NOVEMBER 5, 2001

DAVID THOMSON ON FIRE AND COURAGE ■ JAMES WOOD ON NAIPAUL'S SCARS

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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WHY AFGHANS HATE PAKISTAN By Elizabeth Rubin

THE REAL THREAT

IT'S NOT BIOLOGICAL OR CHEMICAL. IT'S NUCLEAR.
By Gregg Easterbrook

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Pacified

TO THE EDITORS:

Strangely enough, I had just finished reading Katha Pollitt's "Put Out No Flags" when I happened upon "Fault Lines" (by Peter Beinart, October 1). *The Nation* has consistently provided a forum where all is not flag-waving and unabashed patriotism. In the current political moment, to not support Bush and his military strategies, to turn a skeptical eye on the idea of "America as profound victim" is to be a Commie, unpatriotic.

Contrary to Beinart's beliefs, America is not all good. And America is an international supporter of democratic ideals only when they mirror its own. Yes, America has provided relief for many in need the world over. No, America did not act to save those slaughtered in Rwanda. America's sanctions against Iraq do propel suffering and starvation against Iraqi citizens. Whether or not Saddam Hussein is exporting foodstuffs does not justify continuing sanctions that, if lifted, would obviously ensure that fewer people would starve. I do not deny Beinart's right to wave the flag for American victimhood and benevolence, nor should he deny *The Nation*'s and my own right to dissent against what we see as spin, rush to judgment, and virulent unilateralism.

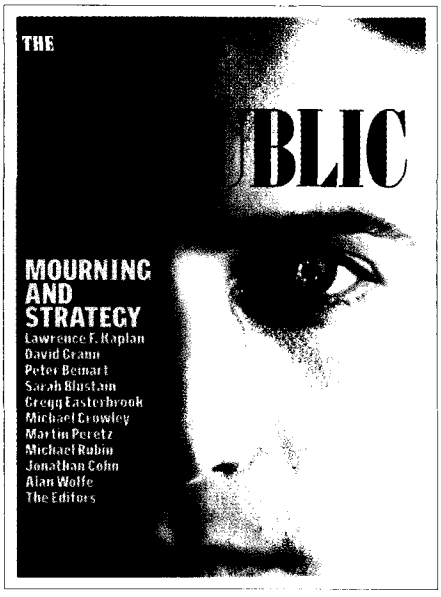
JENNIFER ROGERS
Long Beach, California

World view

TO THE EDITORS:

In this time of crisis we have seen many writers and public figures rise to the occasion and demonstrate much of what is great about the United States. For others, unfortunately, this crisis has brought out an ugly side. Peter Beinart's opportunistic attack on critics of globalization is a disappointing example of the latter ("Sidelines," September 24). Beinart selects a few anonymous comments in a chat room on a British website to support his argument that, although they clearly had nothing to do with bombings, "anti-globalization" protesters hate the United States and are somehow sympathetic with Osama bin Laden. To bolster this absurd claim, he cites passages from a relatively obscure, new academic work, *The Empire*, proclaiming that it is "the bible" of the movement. The reality is that very few prominent globalization critics have ever heard of—let alone read—*The Empire*.

In fact most of the responsible and leading critics of the current system of



globalization share a core belief in democracy, the rule of law, and peaceful cooperation. They have worked for more than two decades to reform existing institutions—such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization—while exploring alternative institutional structures that might better address these problems. This movement includes labor unions, farmers, environmentalists, the religious community, and protesters of all stripes and persuasions. It is, in short, a manifestation of a thriving democracy.

A debate over these important issues is necessary and welcome. Instead, however, Beinart takes the undemocratic position that in the current environment of crisis, "domestic political dissent is immoral." It is astonishing to hear this kind of McCarthy-style rhetoric from an American writer in 2001. This country has a long history of political dissent during wartime. Would Beinart call those who objected to the Vietnam War "immoral"? Moreover this new war on terrorism will likely last for years, not months: Are we to silence the constructive critics of economic globalization for the next decade? Surely Beinart has overreacted in the heat of the moment. Your publication can do better. This is indeed a time for Americans to come together. We can do so in a spirit of internationalism, a spirit of multiculturalism, a spirit of flourishing democracy with a grand tolerance of differences—ideological, religious, and cultural. Look to the high ground, Beinart.

BEN LILLISTON
Communications Coordinator
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Minneapolis, Minnesota

PETER BEINART RESPONDS:

Ben Lilliston says I argued that "'anti-globalization' protesters hate the United States." He's wrong. I argued that *some* anti-globalization protesters hate the United States and that "the anti-globalization movement is not unified in its disdain for America. It is divided by it." Even more dishonestly, he quotes me as writing that in this war, "domestic political dissent is immoral"—a statement he calls "McCarthy-style." But he conveniently leaves out the rest of the sentence. What I wrote was that "domestic political dissent is immoral *without a prior statement of national solidarity*." Immoral is not illegal; I think flag burners are immoral too, but I don't want them arrested. My point was that when the United States is under siege from people who hate us, critics of U.S. policy—be they Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson on the right or the anti-globalization movement on the left—should disassociate themselves from those within their ranks who share that hatred. Lilliston could have spared us his pious indignation had he actually read what I wrote.

Driver's seat

TO THE EDITORS:

Gregg Easterbrook's article "Open Door Policy" was full of flaws (October 1). As a captain for a major U.S. air carrier, I can tell you that transponders don't transmit location or speed to air traffic control (ATC). Only altitude and a unique code that is assigned to each aircraft are transmitted to the radar; a computer at the ATC facility derives all else. Transponders are on from takeoff to landing and, for the most part, are turned on manually. Not all aircraft have cockpit windows that "pop out"—the Lockheed L-1011 and the Boeing 747 being two. However I do think that stronger cockpit doors would be a good idea.

Sky marshals would indeed be expensive. And who would bear that cost? Ultimately the public, of course. But do you realize how inelastic an aircraft seat is? Just add it to the price of the ticket? Why do you think airline management gets so bent out of shape whenever "fees" are added? Market inelasticity and extremely slim profit margin result in declining revenue. You can't just raise ticket prices at will.

The most implausible idea yet is the "panic button." Easterbrook is correct in saying that an entire flight can be made "without anyone ever touching the yoke or throttles"—almost. One must still "touch" quite a few buttons; it isn't

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as automatic as he thinks.

The thought that our training is outdated is true—well, after that fateful Tuesday anyway. I don't think it would be so easy to hijack an airliner now. I think the next guy who pulls a knife on an airplane will get pummeled to death by the passengers.

CAPTAIN ROBERT GALLUP
Atlanta, Georgia

TO THE EDITORS:
As a former air crewman in Navy patrol planes, I certainly agree with Easterbrook's call for steel cockpit doors that would remain closed, but some of his other proposals represent safety hazards to flight. First, transponders that could not be turned off in the event of a fire could cause the loss of the aircraft: The electricity powering the transponder could continue to fuel a fire. Second, a "panic-button system" would also have to have a means to remove power for the above reason. Further, what if the system self-engaged and could not be turned off? How would it be able to alter course to avoid other traffic, abort landings when necessary, etc.? Third, while I cannot say that air marshals should not be armed, a bullet piercing the aircraft skin would cause a very rapid—if not "explosive"—decompression, and the combination of the skin rupture and explosive decompression could cause the loss of the aircraft.

WILLIAM WILGUS
Director
The Public Cause Network
Silver Springs, Florida

GREGG EASTERBROOK REPLIES:
To Robert Gallup's complaint, I was trying to write in easy-to-grasp language for a reading audience that is primarily not composed of airline pilots. Gallup is right of course that transponders do not transmit airspeed or position, but the codes they send, and the way they cooperate with ground radars, help flight controllers to ascertain such things—a reason controllers often have trouble locating general-aviation aircraft flying without transponders. His point that not all aircraft have pop-out windows is an important one, though mainly regarding the 747, since the L-1011 is just shy of retired.

To William Wilgus's objections, the automated transponders on some new corporate jets must have a fire-defeat feature, but I admit I don't know what it is. My article noted that any panic-button system would need a deactivation code. It seems to me the panic button, which would operate from information already stored in the aircraft, would be less prone to techno-snafus than the "remote piloting" idea being batted around in Washington right now, under which the FAA could assume full command of aircraft systems from the ground, and someone in a control tower would have to become a junior captain. Finally, on the subject of handguns in the cockpit, the idea may be good or bad, but the Air Line Pilots Association proposal specifies that weapons be loaded with "frangible" rounds incapable of breaching the hull. And consider, military pilots have been wearing sidearms for years without shooting themselves down.

Fighting words

TO THE EDITORS:
Reasonable people can disagree about how justice should be achieved, and I disagree strongly with the views expressed by Eliot A. Cohen ("How to Fight," September 24). Cohen's screed urges that the United States wage unlimited war against the terrorists who struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the countries that harbor them. Cohen's remarks are deeply disturbing because, as he concedes, they are totally inconsistent with the constitutional principles that this country has historically stood for (not to mention the longstanding moral positions and beliefs I thought were held by the editors of THE NEW REPUBLIC). I was particularly outraged by Cohen's suggestion that, in order to wage war successfully against the terrorists, the United States must engage in "outright assassination"—conduct that he accurately points out Americans have "flinched at" up to now and rightly so.

I continue to flinch. While it may be morally acceptable in certain rare circumstances for one sovereign nation to wage war against another where armies fire upon armies and death is an unfortunate but necessary evil, it is totally unacceptable for this country, the home of a constitution that is the envy of the world, to engage in outright murder for revenge, which is exactly what Cohen advocates. Cohen also suggests that, in waging war against terrorism, we will "pay a price ... in the full scope of our personal liberties." However—as Jeffrey Rosen so cogently points out in "Law and Order," the article preceding Cohen's—it is unlikely that the suspension of our liberties will have any effect whatsoever on reducing the threat of terrorism.

PAUL F. MACRI
Lewiston, Maine

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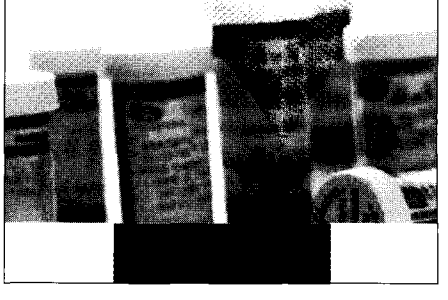

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Out of Egypt

LAST MONTH THE Nobel Committee did something completely useless: It awarded its Peace Prize to Kofi Annan and the United Nations. Was it the UN's anti-racism conference—with its agenda formulated largely in Tehran—that won over the committee? Or perhaps Annan's personal accomplishments—for instance his role, as head of UN peacekeeping in 1995, in pulling blue helmets out of Srebrenica so the Serbs could rape and murder the city's residents without international interference?

The Nobel Peace Prize has value only when it embarrasses a government by focusing attention on some ugly pocket of repression it would like the world to ignore. Desmond Tutu's Peace Prize in 1984 helped fuel the global anti-apartheid movement. Aung San Suu Kyi's in 1991 made Myanmar a human rights cause célèbre. Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and José Ramos-Horta's in 1996 made it harder for Indonesia to cover up its brutality in East Timor. And the Nobel Committee could have embarrassed exactly the right government this year had it chosen jailed Egyptian academic Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

Ibrahim, an internationally respected sociologist, was sentenced to seven years in prison this May on a number of trumped up charges that amount to this: He challenged Hosni Mubarak to hold free elections, respect Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, and make real peace with Israel. He is exactly the kind of person Arab governments want the world to ignore—because he exposes just how vicious and corrupt they really are. And he is exactly the kind of person the world—and particularly the U.S.—needs to champion if we want to win the war on terrorism.

The United States today faces the same dilemma it faced over and over during the cold war. Some of our supposed allies in the war against terrorism—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan—violate the very democratic principles we are fighting to defend. But the fundamentalists they repress are even more illiberal and certainly more hostile to the United States. So, as with cold war autocracies like Chile and the Philippines, the United States must now decide whether to back pro-Western Muslim tyrannies—and thus earn their people's wrath—or push democracy and gamble that it will produce more stable, and more honorable, allies in the long run.

Right now we are emphatically doing the former. No senior U.S. official has publicly mentioned Ibrahim's case, and Mubarak's government boasts that September 11 has vindicated its grizzly crackdown on political dissent. "After these horrible crimes committed in New York and Virginia," said Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Abeid, "maybe Western countries should begin to think of Egypt's own fight [against] terror as their new model."

Egypt's "fight against terror" consists of special military courts, routine torture, the imprisonment of opposition politicians, and an emergency law that has been in place since 1981. And, in some ways, it has worked. Islamist terrorism has decreased sharply since the mid-1990s (although partly through export to Afghanistan and the West). Most of Egypt's remaining Osama bin Ladens are in jail.

The problem is that's where Ibrahim is as well. It was Egypt's emergency law, which the government justifies as a weapon against fundamentalists, that put him behind bars before charges were even filed. A 1992 law, passed to prevent foreign Islamists from funneling money into the country, allowed the government to prosecute Ibrahim for receiving a grant from the European Union. And at trial he sat in the same kind of public cage that confined the fundamentalist assassins of Anwar Sadat.

What Ibrahim's plight makes clear is that when a government abandons the rule of law in its fight against fundamentalists, it usually abandons it altogether. So while it's true that Egypt's crackdown has crippled Islamic terrorism, it has also crippled Egypt's civil society. In the wake of Ibrahim's arrest, some local NGOs, which had relied on foreign funding, have shut down. And as a result there was no effective independent monitoring of last year's parliamentary elections. Under the emergency law, the government has also detained labor activists critical of working conditions at state-owned companies. As Fouad Ajami has written, "The terror had given Mubarak a splendid alibi and an escape from the demands put forth by segments of the middle class and its organizations in the professional syndicates—the lawyers, the engineers, and the journalists—for a measure of political participation." And, of course, the lack of political participation means greater corruption, which means greater poverty, which plays into the Islamists' hands.

The "fight against terror" has devastated Egyptian civil society in another way as well. To compensate for the lack of political freedom, Mubarak has given fundamentalists unprecedented control over Egypt's educational system and cultural life. Books considered offensive to Islam are banned and their authors arrested. This July, 52 alleged homosexuals were put on trial for "contempt for religion." Entire schools have banned the Egyptian flag and national anthem as symbols of secularism. Saudi Arabia has done something similar, handing over its schools to militant clerics in an effort to buy them off. To preserve themselves today the regimes are sowing the seeds of a theocratic future.

In other words, Hosni Mubarak is destroying Egypt in order to save it. And the United States is blithely playing along. But there is another way—more dangerous in the short run, perhaps, but safer over the long haul: It is Saad Ibrahim's way. Ibrahim is a liberal and a secularist—just the kind of person that Egypt's Islamists have targeted for assassination. And yet, after intensively studying the fundamentalists, he says Egypt should respect their rights—jailing only those who advocate violence and allowing more moderate Islamists to participate freely in politics, in the hope that the democratic process will wean them from their more bloodthirsty brethren.

What Ibrahim believes, and Mubarak does not, is that liberal democracy—if given a chance—will prove more attractive to Egypt's suffering, embittered people than the confinement of *sharia* and the fantasy of jihad. And the real question for the United States as it enters this new era is whether we believe that too. Even before September 11, intellectuals and politicians called America's post-cold-war campaign for democracy a hubristic delusion. During the second presidential debate, George W. Bush explained, "I just don't think it's the role of the United States to walk into a country and say, 'We do it this way, so should you.' " The Muslim world, in particular, was deemed culturally incapable of democracy. Just not up to it. Guys like Mubarak, the right-wing relativists argued, with an air of resignation, are the best they can do.

After September 11 those arguments really matter—they define the moral framework within which America goes to war. Is our alternative to Osama bin Laden Hosni Mubarak, or is it Saad Eddin Ibrahim? And if it's the former, does anyone seriously think we can win?

PETER BEINART

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Our Reasons

IT IS AN old truth that language is an early casualty of war, especially official language. Despite the grumbling of the press about the Pentagon's secrecy in the conduct of its campaign in Central Asia, we have no reason to believe that the country is being fed lies; and yet there are reasons to worry about an evolution of strategic will, a change of military tone. The development is disguised in the administration's unexpected passion for nation-building in Afghanistan.

"Nation-building" is a term with an intense and interesting history in recent times. The story comes in three chapters. It begins, of course, with the presidential campaign of 2000, in which the discussion of foreign policy, insofar as there was a discussion of foreign policy (September 11 now represents, among other things, the end of the end of foreign policy), consisted mainly of a debate about nation-building. George W. Bush was fervently against it. For his inchoate isolationism, nation-building epitomized the failure of foreign policy in the Clinton years. In an interview on October 11, 2000, he stated his opposition clearly: "Somalia. It started off as a humanitarian mission, then changed into a nation-building mission, and that's where the mission went wrong.... and so I don't think our troops ought to be used for what's called nation-building. I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war."

Dissolve to the flaming, falling towers. The American war on terrorism required a swift revision of the new president's understanding of the requirements of American intervention. Suddenly it appeared that military force may have more than military objectives; and that political realities far, far away may affect the planning and the execution of military operations; and that military successes may be undone by political failures. In the early weeks of Operation Enduring Freedom, the idea of military action and the idea of nation-building consorted comfortably together. In Afghanistan we would do what is good for us and what is good for Afghanistan. This was the second chapter in the recent career of "nation-building."

Then things got sticky. We discovered how sorely we have need of Pakistan and how sorely Pakistan has no need of the Northern Alliance. American officials began to speak a great deal about "post-Taliban Afghanistan," about the rebels and the tribes and the king. Bodies were still being discovered in the smoldering pit in Liberty Plaza when experts began to weigh the advantages and the disadvantages of a *loya jirga*. The United States had put its forces on the ground in Afghanistan precisely when it became urgent to understand the postwar role that might be played by the odious Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Slowly the foreground and the background are exchanging places: instead of the war against Al Qaeda serving as the premise of nation-building in Afghanistan, nation-building in Afghanistan is coming to serve more and more as the premise of the war against Al Qaeda. The great cause looks increasingly like the Great Game.

What has happened is that "nation-building" has mutated from a euphemism for vigorous intervention into a euphemism for unvigorous intervention. What was once a moral ambition has become a strategic inhibition. And so it is essential that we beware of the spell that nation-building has cast over this American campaign. For a start, Operation Enduring Freedom is not a humanitarian intervention. It is a war in defense of the United States. If we leave behind a country in chaos that can no longer serve as a base of operations against us, then we will have accomplished a necessary objective. And there is another reason to lose the obsession with nation-building: you cannot engage in nation-building where there is not a nation to build. Afghanistan is surely such a pre-national place. The only principle of political legitimacy in those mountains and those plains is ethnicity. What sort of coherent and overarching polity does Colin Powell propose to make out of the Pashtuns and the Tajiks and the Uzbeks? Democratization in Afghanistan requires, let us say, the long view.

In recent days, anthrax has driven Afghanistan almost completely off the front page. Those seeking news of the war have had to repair to the blue line at the bottom of CNN's screen, where air sorties and special ops vie for attention with O.J. Simpson's road rage. (The terrorists did not defeat us!) The alarm about anthrax is perfectly understandable, but the anthrax in our midst is not a health problem, it is an act of aggression against us; and this act of aggression cannot be understood properly except in terms of the American war in Afghanistan; and the American war in Afghanistan cannot be understood properly except as a war against terrorism. So enough about the pluralistic future of the Hindu Kush. We are destroying one of the world's most primitive and tyrannical regimes, but we have perfectly just reasons of our own for doing so. This time we are not making the world safe for democracy, we are making the world safe for Americans. That, too, is a meritorious enterprise. ■

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NOTEBOOK

IDIOCY WATCH, CONT'D: "The moral vision of Hitler is a moral vision. We have to distinguish between moralities we approve and moralities we despise. A morality simply means that someone who has one has a world view in which certain kinds of outcomes are desired and certain kinds of strategies are necessary."—Stanley Fish, "The O'Reilly Factor," October 17

"How we dare even prate about democracy is beyond me. Our form of democracy is bribery, on the highest scale. It's far worse than anything that occurred in the Roman empire, until the praetorian guard started to sell the principate. We're not a democracy, and we have absolutely nothing to give the world in the way of political ideas or political arrangements."—Gore Vidal, interview with the *New Statesman*, October 15

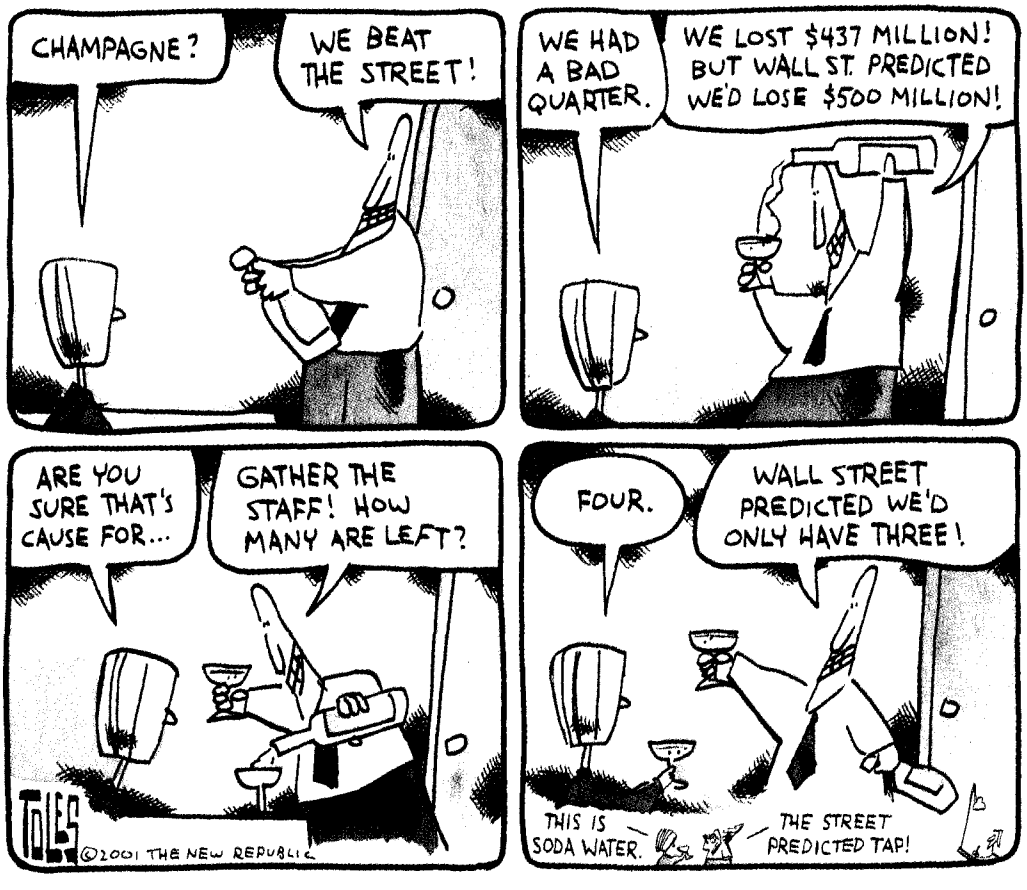
"Bill Maher has been getting a pounding because on his television program he said something that some found controversial.... [S]ponsors began removing their advertising from the show, and now ABC, the network that he's on, is saying that they may not do the show. We've heard this song before, right? In the fifties there was a blacklist, and it ruined lives.... Well, we're there, right now. It's happening all over again."—"West Wing" producer Aaron Sorkin, speaking at a forum at Occidental College, October 22

"My friend Ruth Rendell was in conversation at the Cheltenham Literary Festival last weekend. Her sell-out audience was conservative and over-50. Someone asked a question about pure evil, citing the terrorist attacks on America as an example. With great presence, Rendell replied that we could not categorise such attacks as evil, since they were carried out from the highest motives and in the name of freedom. The audience hated this reply—there was a collective and audible shudder. Yet who reading Bin Laden's speeches can doubt it? There is no cynicism in the man—he has never heard of a spin doctor.... We need not sympathise with him to recognise a gulf between the pragmatic concerns of the west and the fervent beliefs of the east. How to bridge east and west is the question—and bombs are not the answer."—Jeanette Winterson, *The Guardian*, October 16

"Enduring Freedom for some means Enduring Subjugation for others. The International Coalition Against Terror is a largely [sic] cabal of the richest countries in the world. Between them, they manufacture and sell almost all of the world's weapons, they possess the largest stockpile of weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological and nuclear. They have fought the most wars, account for most of the genocide, subjection, ethnic cleansing and human rights violations in modern history, and have sponsored, armed and financed untold numbers of dictators and despots. Between them, they have worshipped, almost deified, the cult of violence and war. For all its appalling sins, the Taliban just isn't in the same league."—Arundhati Roy (repeat appearance), *The Guardian*, October 23

A complete collection of Idiocy Watches to date can be found at THE NEW REPUBLIC ONLINE (*www.thenewrepublic.com*). Further nominees may be sent to online@tnr.com.

UNDER SPIN: Robert Fisk, Middle Eastern correspondent for *The Independent* (and seven-time recipient of the British International Journalist of the Year Award), has made a valiant bid for inclusion in Idiocy Watch. But the dishonesty of his October 23 *Independent* article overwhelms its idiocy. "And so the casualties begin to mount,"


CHAMPAGNE?
WE BEAT THE STREET!
WE HAD A BAD QUARTER.
WE LOST $437 MILLION! BUT WALL ST. PREDICTED WE'D LOSE $500 MILLION!
ARE YOU SURE THAT'S CAUSE FOR...
GATHER THE STAFF! HOW MANY ARE LEFT?
TOLES ©2001 THE NEW REPUBLIC
FOUR.
WALL STREET PREDICTED WE'D ONLY HAVE THREE!
THIS IS SODA WATER.
THE STREET PREDICTED TAP!

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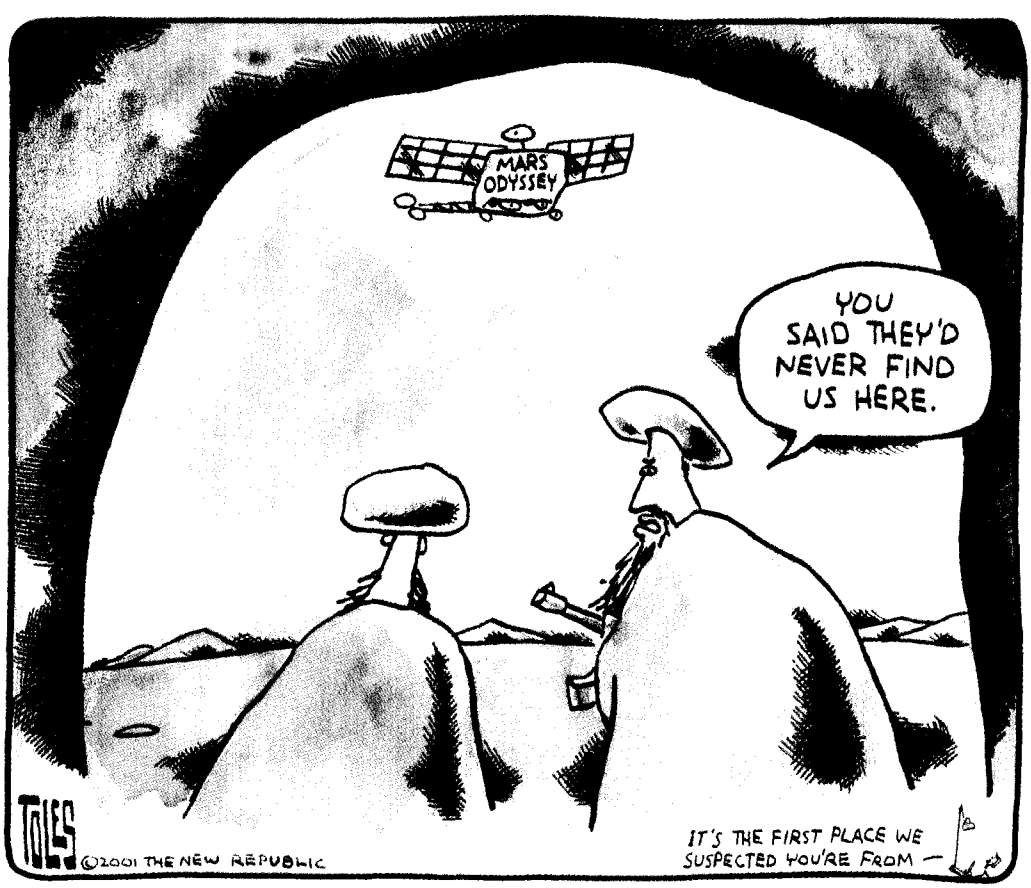
writes Fisk. "From Kandahar come ever more frightful stories of civilians buried under ruins, of children torn to pieces by American bombs. The Taliban—and here the Americans must breathe a collective sigh of relief—refuse to allow Western journalists to enter the country to verify these reports. So when a few television crews were able to find 18 fresh graves in the devastated village of Khorum outside Jalalabad just over a week ago, the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld could ridicule the deaths as 'ridiculous.' But not, I suspect, for much longer." The TV crews "found" these graves, of course, during an October 15 tour sponsored by the Taliban. And their real significance isn't that there were so many; it's that there were so few: The Taliban claimed that 200 people in Khorum had been killed. Eighteen civilian deaths is a tragedy—but one can only assume that if it were a more common one, the Taliban would be offering more tours.

REALITY GULF: Yasir Arafat is the world's senior terrorist. He was skyjacking when Osama bin Laden was still a rich kid in Saudi Arabia. He and his bloodthirsty lieutenants are responsible for literally hundreds of car bombings, kidnappings, suicide bombings, drive-by shootings, sniper fire, knifings, and just plain massacres over the decades. And he has not become a different man in the new millennium, as the yearlong spasm of orchestrated Palestinian violence and terror surely makes clear. But don't tell this to Colin Powell. Virtually every time Israel tries to punish or preempt a terrorist strike against its civilian population, the Department of State insists that Jerusalem is endangering a peace process that, in truth, is already long dead. A few days ago Israeli troops surrounded six Palestinian cities, killing particular and identifiable terrorists while arresting others—seeking, apparently, to arrest several members of the cell that spawned the assassin of Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi. Washington complained that Israeli penetration of Palestinian-ruled areas endangered the anti-terrorist coalition of which various Arab governments are said to be an integral part. This is odd logic, given that the Arab governments are not, in any sense, an integral part of the anti-terrorist coalition. During the Gulf war there was, at least, a factotum Saudi commander and a few other uniformed Arabs in the field. This war features no Arab troops. In fact our Arab "coalition partners"—particularly Saudi Arabia—are actively sabotaging our efforts to identify the wider terrorist international, made up in large part, of course, of their citizens. So what, exactly, is the all-important purpose in whose name we are demanding that Israel sit back and allow its citizens to be slaughtered?

BIPARTISANSHIP, THEN AND NOW: Democrats and Republicans may be walking arm in arm these days, but there's at least one Washington grump unwilling to embrace the new bipartisanship: the ur-partisan himself, Newt Gingrich, now a Fox News "analyst." At nearly every turn, Gingrich has blamed September 11 on the Clinton administration's "pathetically weak, ineffective ability to focus and stay focused." As he told *The Washington Times*, "When I look at what the Clinton administration said—and did—it was astounding. I felt very sad when the planes hit the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, because it was possible to hunt these people down over eight years." In particular he has described Bill Clinton's 1998 cruise missile attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan (in response to the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania) as "totally inadequate." And, of course, he's right. Problem is, at the time, he described the cruise missile pinpricks as "exactly the right thing." Perhaps he should have been a little more partisan then. ■



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White House Watch

Backfired

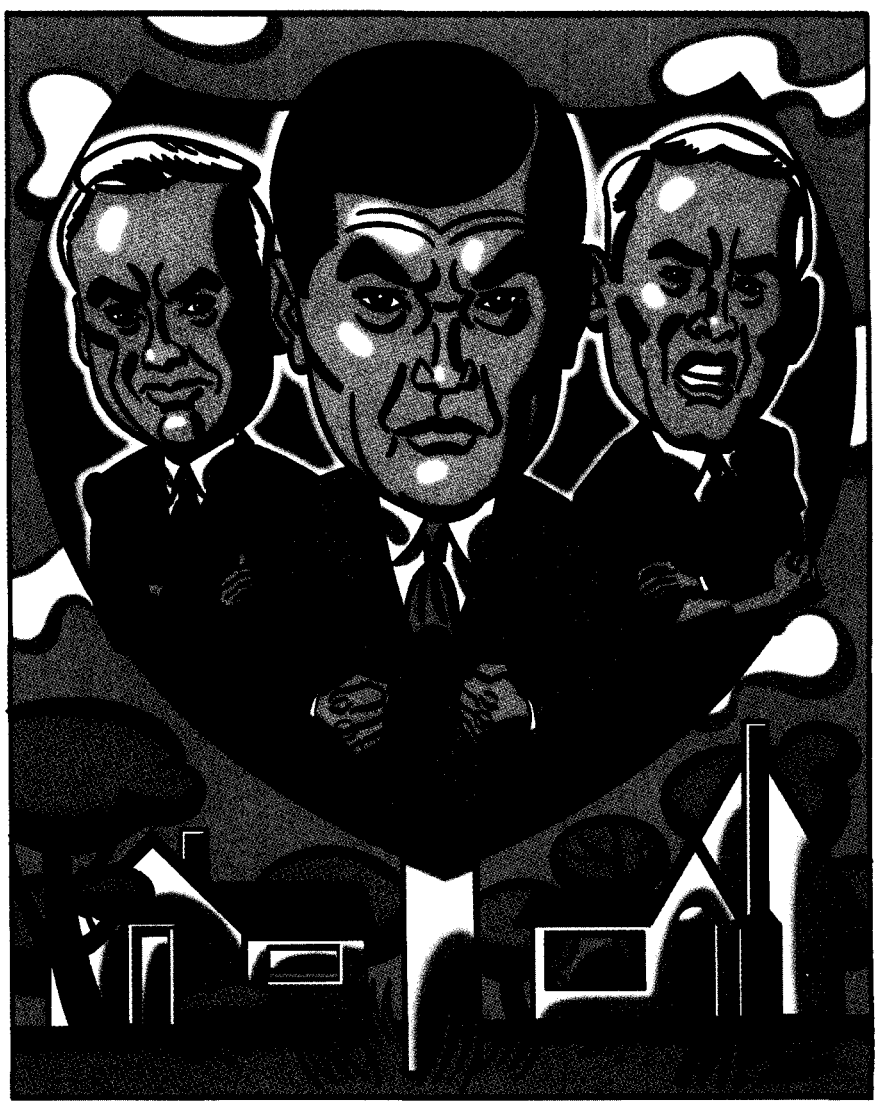
By Ryan Lizza

It's not often that the White House holds a press conference to announce a demotion. But that's what happened on October 9, when Tom Ridge, President Bush's new homeland security adviser, and Condoleezza Rice, his national security adviser, introduced the administration's newest anti-terrorism staffers. At a sterile ceremony in the fourth-floor briefing room of the Old Executive Office Building, Ridge and Rice announced that Richard Clarke, a pale, gray-haired man sitting on stage in an ill-fitting suit, would be the special assistant to the president for cyberspace security. It's an important job, and insiders say Clarke wanted it. But it's also a step down: For the last three years Clarke has held the more exalted title of National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Counter-Terrorism—America's terrorism czar. Sitting next to Clarke at the ceremony was the new czar, Wayne A. Downing, a retired four-star general who will report to both Ridge and Rice and hold the rank of deputy national security adviser. The shift from Clarke, the bureaucratic insider, to Downing, the Army general, signals something important: The war on terrorism will no longer be directed by people who specialize in politics; it will be directed by people who specialize in war.

For almost three decades Clarke mastered official Washington. What he didn't master was counterterrorism. His first brush with notoriety came in 1986 when, as one of the State Department's top intelligence officers, he hatched a bizarre scheme to incite a coup against Muammar Qaddafi in retaliation for the Libyan strongman's support of terrorism. Clarke's plan called for American planes to produce a wave of sonic booms over Libyan airspace while empty rafts washed ashore—not to attack, but to create the *effect* of an attack, which would spur Qaddafi's enemies to move against him. The plan became public, was scrapped, and created a small scandal for the Reagan White House. Then, in 1992, Clarke's State Department career abruptly ended when the inspector general accused him of failing to stop illegal transfers of sensitive U.S. military technology to China. Clarke strongly denied the accusations but fled State and landed at the National Security Council.

Things didn't go much better there. In 1993 he oversaw Somalia policy during the American intervention, the greatest military debacle of the 1990s. Clarke was also in the middle of the botched effort to get Osama bin Laden in 1996, when the Clinton administration rejected—as *The Washington Post* recently revealed—a Sudanese offer to hand him over. Then, in 1998, he played a key role in the Clinton administration's misguided retaliation for the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which targeted bin Laden's terrorist camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. Clarke reportedly steamrolled intelligence officials who doubted (correctly) the evidence linking the Sudanese factory to either bin Laden or chemical weapons.

Those strikes, we now know, were primarily dictated by political rather than military concerns. They were coordinated because the United States wanted to prove we could hit two far-flung targets simultaneously (the attacks were dubbed "Operation Infinite Reach") and perhaps even because some U.S. officials believed (erroneously) that the Sudanese had attempted to assassinate Tony Lake. And the search for a proper target in Sudan got further bogged down in an attempt to limit civilian casualties. The White House made a fateful decision to strike at night when no workers



Richard Clarke, Tom Ridge, and Wayne A. Downing (left to right).

MITCH O'CONNELL

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Were the Hijackers Registered to Vote?

Diane Ravitch is a research professor, New York University; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

In the aftermath of the worst terrorist attack in American history, the media have noted how easily the terrorists blended into our open society. They joined health clubs, rented cars, got pilot training, patronized neighborhood bars, obtained credit cards, and moved about freely, without anyone noticing that they were planning a heinous crime or that some were on the FBI's terrorism watch list.

When they bought their one-way tickets to California, the hijackers identified themselves with a driver's license, as most people do. News reports indicated that most obtained their drivers' licenses in New Jersey, Michigan, Virginia, and Florida. Thus far, no reporter has observed that **the hijackers were eligible to vote in state and federal elections, despite the fact that they were not American citizens.**

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (the motor-voter law) requires that states permit anyone who gets a driver's license to register to vote at the same time. Usually, applicants who register to vote are asked to affirm (without any proof) that they are citizens. Because state motor vehicle bureaus do not have the capability to check applicants' citizenship status, most freely grant drivers' licenses and register voters without regard to citizenship status. Some states have knowingly issued drivers' licenses to tens of thousands of noncitizens. No one knows how many ineligible noncitizens may be registered to vote across the nation as a result of this process.

Most other democratic nations require their citizens to identify themselves before voting, but most of our states do not. Only fourteen states require voters to produce some form of identification. In some states, a sufficient ID may be a driver's license, a student ID, or even a hunting license, all of which are available to noncitizens. **To protect the sanctity of the franchise, potential voters should be required to present proof of citizenship when they register and proof of identity when they vote.**

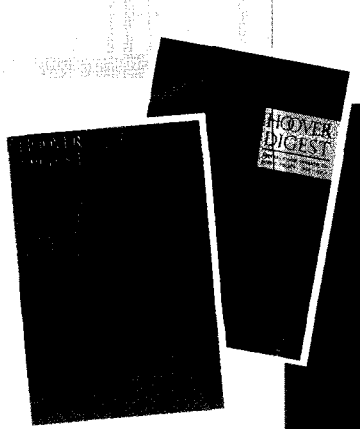
There is no evidence that voter turnout would be reduced by requiring people to identify themselves, both when registering to vote and when actually voting. Americans expect to identify themselves when boarding airplanes or buying alcohol or collecting government benefits. To date, Congress has been unconcerned about this large loophole that allows noncitizens to exercise the precious right of voting.

It is highly unlikely that voters would object to identifying themselves as eligible citizens when exercising the most fundamental of our rights, the right to participate in selecting those who govern us.

As the events of the past few weeks show, Americans are a resilient people, zealous about protecting our constitutional rights—none of which would be undermined by restricting the franchise to eligible citizens. Indeed, that restriction is already written into our Constitution. It is time to tighten up the motor-voter act and make sure that only qualified American citizens vote in our elections.

— Diane Ravitch

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



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would be present. The result, as a little-noticed report by CNN recently explained, was that both attacks were delayed just long enough so that bin Laden left his Afghan camp an hour or two before the missiles landed. An uncharitable assessment might suggest that, for the second time in two years, Clarke was central to a decision that led to bin Laden's escape.

But even as these decisions were backfiring, Clarke was demonstrating his real skill: political survival. He is the longest-serving member of the NSC. Universally described as a master of bureaucracy, he made himself indispensable to the NSC transition teams of both the Clintonites and the Bushies. He thus became the only NSC staffer from the first Bush administration retained by Clinton, and one of the only Clinton staffers kept on by the younger Bush. "Dick Clarke is the ultimate survivor," says Larry Johnson, a former CIA officer and counterterrorism official at the State Department. "He is a bureaucrat's bureaucrat. He knows how to write memos, move the paper. The guy's a master."

And it's in political fights that Clarke has had his greatest triumphs. He worked the budget process to increase counterterrorism spending from $5.7 billion in 1995 to $12 billion in 2001. He helped lead a successful administration campaign to oust Boutros Boutros-Ghali as secretary general of the United Nations in 1996. More broadly Clarke tried, at the end of Clinton's term, to formulate a new U.S. terrorist doctrine not dissimilar to the one now articulated by Bush—that the United States would not distinguish between terrorists and the states that harbor them. "We may not just go in and strike against a terrorist facility; we may choose to retaliate against the facilities of the host country, if that host country is a knowing, cooperative sanctuary," he told the Associated Press in 1999. But nobody remembers this because Clarke didn't have the stature to put counterterrorism policy on the front page.

His successor, needless to say, won't have that problem. For William Downing there is nothing metaphorical about the "war" on terrorism. Downing is a highly decorated soldier who graduated from West Point and served several combat tours in Vietnam. He directed special forces in Operation Just Cause, which snatched Manuel Noriega from Panama in 1989. He also led them during the Gulf war. During Somalia, while Clarke coordinated policy from the White House, Downing commanded the elite U.S. troops on the ground. The 18 Americans killed in the October 1993 raid to capture warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed were directed by Downing, whose request to use AC-130 gunships for support was turned down by then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell—a debate that could be a harbinger of things to come in the current administration.

Since his retirement in 1996 Downing has been known mostly for his unvarnished views about how to fight terrorism. In a frank report on the Khobar Towers bombing, requested by the Pentagon, he blamed the general in charge of the facility for failing to take proper security measures. The general resigned. In the same report he called terrorism "a form of warfare," and he explicitly rejected the idea of pursuing terrorists as we pursue criminals: "These terrorists are not criminals in the conventional sense. They must be seen as 'soldiers.'" Downing noted as far back as 1996 what September 11 has made a cliché: You can't fight terrorism without much better human intelligence. He also sat on the 1999 National Commission on Terrorism, which recommended many of the anti-terrorism measures now being rushed through Congress (see "Sin of Commission," by Franklin Foer, October 8).

With respect to the ongoing debate within the administration about whether to target Iraq after operations end in Afghanistan, there's no question about Downing's views: He literally wrote the battle plan for overthrowing Saddam. Besides Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, and Richard Perle, a formal Pentagon policy adviser, few in Washington are identified as closely with replacing the current Iraqi regime. For the last few years Downing has advised the anti-Saddam Iraqi National Congress. His overthrow plan—unveiled to think tank conservatives and members of Congress—called for U.S.-armed and -trained rebels to launch an attack from safe zones within Iraq that are protected by American air power.

Clearly Downing possesses the right qualities for fighting a war on terrorism. The big question will be how well the four-star general maneuvers the internecine politics of the federal bureaucracy. Perhaps he should stop by Clarke's office for some tips. ■

On the Hill

Long Shot

By Michael Crowley

If you're scared witless by the anthrax horror spreading across the country, take heart: The government has an anthrax vaccine that will immunize you and let you chuck that recent Cipro prescription. There are, however, a few small drawbacks. There's only enough vaccine on hand for at most 4,000 people. The vaccine requires months of painful shots before taking effect. The one factory that produces it has been dormant for three years—and it's so tangled in red tape that no one knows when it will be running again.

In other words, for all practical purposes, there is no available anthrax vaccine. How did this happen? After all, while almost no one believes the current anthrax threat warrants nationwide inoculation, a plentiful and efficient vaccine would come in awfully handy right now for postal workers, police, firefighters, and perhaps even that segment of the public neurotic enough to risk minor side effects for peace of mind. What's more, some scientists think the anthrax vaccine could be a highly effective treatment for the disease, even after infection.

Unfortunately we're out of luck. And the reason is political shortsightedness, paranoid conspiracy theories, and bureau-

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cratic sluggishness. Yes, a Manhattan Project-style effort against bioweapons may produce plenty of good anthrax vaccine within a couple of years. But try explaining that to the postal worker who has to sort the mail tomorrow morning.

ANTHRAX TERRORISM MAY have surprised most Americans, but it shouldn't have shocked any government leader who has been paying attention. Scientists and federal officials have been warning for decades that anthrax could become a terrorist weapon of choice—warnings confirmed by the discovery of large anthrax stockpiles in the arsenal of Saddam Hussein following the Gulf war. But, nonetheless, top military and government leaders didn't make countering the threat a priority. In 1991, for example, Army officials discussed creating a massive civilian vaccine stockpile—if for no other reason than to show that the United States was prepared. But at a time of shrinking military budgets, the plan never left the drawing board. (Pentagon officials questioned even the affordability of a more limited plan to inoculate U.S. troops.)

The Clinton years proved no better. The administration's response to the bioterror danger was typified by National Security Adviser Anthony Lake's response to a 1994 warning from renowned microbiologist Joshua Lederberg. "Do I really have to worry about that?" Lake said, according to the book *Germs: Biological Weapons and America's Secret War*. "I've got enough on my plate right now."

Over subsequent years, as terrorist episodes accumulated—the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo gas attack in the Tokyo subway, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing—administration officials paid greater lip service to the anthrax threat, but that was about it. In 1997 Defense Secretary William Cohen terrified Cokie Roberts with a five-pound bag of sugar on the ABC talk show "This Week," warning, "This amount of anthrax could be spread over a city—let's say the size of Washington. It would destroy at least half the population of that city." But Cohen's proposed response—a plan to vaccinate all 2.4 million members of the U.S. armed services—would have done little for the civilian population of Washington or any other city. What's more, it wasn't even fully implemented. The program was interrupted due to logistical problems after inoculations began on only 520,000 troops.

In 1997 Bill Clinton finally took a personal interest in bioterrorism—bizarrely, after reading Richard Preston's *The Cobra Event*, a pulp thriller about a killer virus that makes people claw out their own eyes. Soon afterward Clinton called a bioterror attack "highly likely" and, in his final two budgets, sought huge spending increases for biodefense. In 1998, for instance, he proposed $51 million to help create "a civilian stockpile of antidotes, antibiotics and vaccines"—including anthrax vaccine. But according to *The New York Times*, Health and Human Services officials talked Clinton out of new money for vaccines, convincing him to shift it to antibiotics and other priorities. The following year Clinton considered a plan to vaccinate police officers, firefighters, and other "first responders." But that idea, too, went nowhere. The United States didn't even have enough vaccine to inoculate its soldiers.

But indifference was only one reason the government didn't aggressively pursue a vaccine. Another was hysteria—in particular the minor frenzy provoked by the Pentagon's effort to vaccinate U.S. troops. The program began during the Gulf war, when then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell pushed to inoculate 150,000 American soldiers. Yet this relatively uncontroversial plan became a political disaster following Cohen's 1997 decision to extend the vaccinations to all U.S. troops. After early recipients of the vaccine complained of side effects ranging from ringing ears to swollen testicles, the program quickly became a vessel for free-floating distrust of the government, fueled by paranoia over a possible "Gulf War syndrome" that was still raging among well-organized veterans. Thousands of troops, most of whom had been stationed in the Gulf, complained about strange maladies that doctors were never able to identify and which some chalked up to psychological stress. Mistrust of the government skyrocketed when the Pentagon belatedly admitted that troops destroying Iraqi chemical weapons might have been exposed to them, kindling memories of Agent Orange.

In this climate, conspiracy theories ran rampant. Websites promoting a Black Helicopter view of the world sprang up across the Internet. "ANTHRAX VACCINE: CURE OR CONSPIRACY?" asked one. "President Clinton won't take the vaccine because he's no fool." Zealous lawyers, including Mark Zaid of the James Madison Project, a crusader against government secrecy, took the opportunity to dredge up every embarrassing Pentagon document that he could legally acquire. For instance, when Zaid found a draft army memo that would indemnify potential vaccine manufacturers from the "unusually hazardous" legal risks of the job, he treated it as proof the Pentagon didn't trust its own program. In a typical press release, Zaid said the Pentagon might have used methods similar "to that which we condemned the Nazis [for] performing 50 years ago ... our troops have been used as guinea pigs." Zaid had willing allies in Congress, like Clinton-hating Indiana Congressman Dan Burton, whose House Government Reform Committee released a scathing report last year accusing the military of a "post Gulf War panic over apparent weaknesses in chemical and biological warfare defenses." And the mass media took the paranoiacs seriously, with newspapers around the country—as well as glossy magazines like *People* and *Vanity Fair*—writing sympathetic accounts of the vaccine critics. Soon the Pentagon was confronted with hundreds of troops who were risking court martial or leaving the service altogether rather than take the vaccine.

To be sure, the vaccine isn't perfect. Its regimen of six shots over 18 months is slow and difficult to administer. And, says Gigi Kwik of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Civilian Biodefense Studies, "It's not pleasant. It burns." But it's still basically safe, according to the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control. In February 2000, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that just 620 of the 400,000 vaccinated troops reported side effects, and only six of them had vaccine-related symptoms requiring hospitalization.

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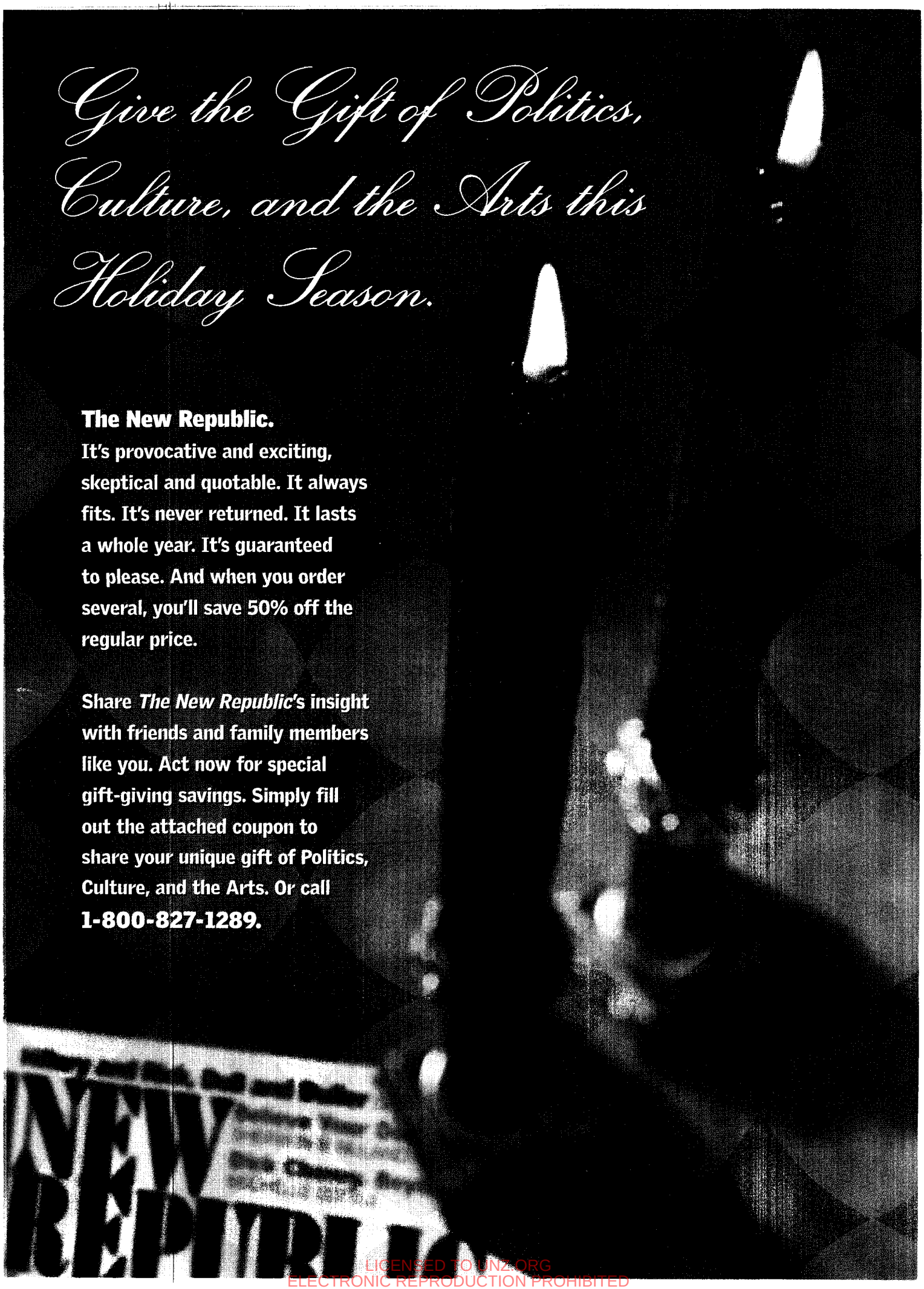

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Ironically, the same paranoia that resisted inoculation with the current vaccine has also impeded research into better ones. When a researcher in Amherst, Massachusetts, began work on a promising new anthrax vaccine in the late 1980s, for instance, he was protested by the Quaker-led American Friends Service Committee, which petitioned local officials to declare the town "a biological warfare research-free zone." And when, less than a week before the September 11 attacks, *The New York Times* reported that the Pentagon had been secretly conducting advanced anthrax vaccine research in Ohio, the news was presented as a disturbing sign that the United States might be violating the spirit of a global bioweapons ban.

IN ADDITION TO negligence and paranoia, there is a final culprit: good, old-fashioned, bureaucratic boondoggle. It had been clear for years that the creation of an effective and plentiful vaccine couldn't be left to the private sector—bioweapon vaccines have never promised much in the way of profits. Until recently, pharmaceutical companies didn't believe there would be widespread public demand and worried that production might be hazardous and would permanently contaminate their equipment. Indeed when the army encouraged drug companies to develop a better anthrax vaccine as far back as 1985, according to *Germs*, none so much as bid for the contract.

In the aftermath of the Gulf war, the Defense Department decided it needed plentiful doses of anthrax vaccine. A special team of scientists, known as "Project Badger," was charged with figuring out how they could be made. At the time the sole U.S. supplier of the vaccine was a small, antiquated laboratory owned by the state of Michigan. In 1994 Project Badger recommended that the military create its own federal vaccine facility in Arkansas or Maryland. Military scientists also recommended that the United States invest in a new vaccine, based on recent breakthroughs in DNA research, that might be easier to produce and administer. But the military stuck with the Michigan lab instead, issuing it a large contract and leaving the parallel research with scant support. "DoD picked the wrong fork in the road, primarily because they thought it was cheaper and easier," says Larry Halloran, a House Government Reform Committee staffer.

Things got worse in 1998, when the state of Michigan sold the lab to BioPort, a company whose board of directors included retired Admiral William Crowe, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and one of the few high-ranking military officers to endorse Bill Clinton in 1992. Since the sale to BioPort, the lab has not made a single dose of anthrax vaccine. Despite receiving $126 million in Defense Department expenditures over the past three years, it has failed to meet FDA regulations—despite warnings that date back to the mid-'90s. "In retrospect, the whole notion of turning this over to a new contractor instead of an established pharmaceutical company looks questionable," Tara O'Toole of the Johns Hopkins biodefense center told *The New York Times* this month.

So now the United States must wait for BioPort—itself still awaiting FDA approval to resume production—to begin churning out the millions of doses it agreed to deliver years ago. Of course, once the doses are delivered, it will still be another 18 months before anyone is safely inoculated. The government could always abandon BioPort and build its own plant—but that, according to Halloran, would take about seven years. Which means that if the Defense Department had made the proper decision in 1994, the assembly line would be running today. ■

Look who's against dropping food.

Pie in the Sky

By JONATHAN CHAIT

YOU COULD TELL, in the days following September 11, that lefties were looking for reasons to oppose U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan. At first they flailed about for a rationale but, in the last couple of weeks, they seem to have settled on one argument: By interfering with humanitarian relief efforts, the U.S. military response is exacerbating the famine in Afghanistan. The criticism has received massive attention overseas—it is an obsession of the British press, and it has prompted anti-American diatribes by a gaggle of humanitarian and UN commissioner-types—and it is gaining ground at home as well. An article in the left-leaning *In These Times*, entitled "Collateral Famine," argued that "the effect of Washington's actions may be to sentence millions of [Afghans] to death for the policies of their leaders."

The bombing has indeed made it difficult for outside famine relief efforts to reach as many people as they did before military action began. And so, in an effort to at least partially make up for the disruption, American planes have been dropping food packets—more than 850,000 to date. That's where the left's argument gets really strange: In the name of humanitarianism, they oppose the food drops as well.

This opposition takes the form of several shifting, often contradictory, claims. The first is that they're inefficient. Whereas food from the United Nations is trucked in and distributed by humanitarian groups on the basis of need, military airdrops are haphazard. Instead of targeting the needy, aid agencies complain, air-dropped food packets often wind up in the hands of whoever has the most guns, rather than whoever has the greatest need.

It's true that people on the ground *generally* deliver food more effectively. But some mountainous parts of Afghanistan can only be reached by plane. And the location of plane-dropped food isn't completely random—American pilots target high-need villages. Moreover it's far from clear that plane drops are more likely to be seized by soldiers. The food packets are scattered, so Taliban forces can only get their hands on some of them. The UN food supply, by contrast, is concentrated in easily seized warehouses. Just last week, for instance, the Taliban snatched nearly half the UN food sup-

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ply in Afghanistan. (The Taliban soon released one of the warehouses, but the point is that they can take it back whenever they want.)

The second criticism of food drops is more severe. Aid agencies don't merely think the Pentagon's campaign is wasteful but, as an official from Oxfam told ABC News, that it "can create more problems than it solves." How's that? Well, the packets can land in minefields, luring civilians to their unwitting deaths. But there's absolutely no evidence that such deaths would come anywhere close to matching the number of lives saved. An equally common objection is that the food packets represent "a drop in the bucket." If you think the food drops do net harm, that's a strange charge—sort of like the restaurant patron who complains that the food is inedible, and the portions are too small.

The most fundamental objection, however, is that the food drops taint all humanitarian aid. "The fear is that the Taliban government will now see all aid as being part of the U.S. military objective," argued another Oxfam official, "and shut down all food delivery." This assumes, implausibly, that the Taliban can't distinguish between bright yellow packets of American food fluttering through the air and trucks full of wheat operated by civilian do-gooders.

The truth is that it's not the Taliban who are worried about distinguishing between military and strictly humanitarian relief; it's the aid agencies. In part this reflects institutional narcissism. Just as surgeons tend to think medical problems should be addressed with surgery, aid agencies tend to think humanitarian crises should be addressed by aid agencies. After NATO soldiers sheltered and fed thousands of refugees from Kosovo two years ago, humanitarian groups complained of being overshadowed.

But the deeper reason that humanitarian groups believe the food drops taint relief efforts has nothing to do with their effectiveness. Despite their protestations of neutrality, the aid agencies simply oppose American bombing and, in their view, anything associated with it is morally tainted—regardless of whether or not it saves lives. Criticizing the military for dropping food is really a way of criticizing the military for dropping bombs. The Nobel Prize-winning aid organization Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) generated international buzz when it denounced the food drops as "military propaganda." The drops certainly have a political message—namely that the United States bears no ill will toward the Afghan people—but this is only objectionable to those who disagree with it. The group's president, Jean-Herve Bradol, made the point still more explicit, explaining, "You are shooting with one hand while offering aid with the other."

Sure enough, in addition to sniping at the food drops, some aid agencies have called on the Pentagon to pause all military operations in Afghanistan. The rationale for the pause sounds eminently reasonable: Humanitarian organizations must stockpile food supplies by the onset of winter, at which point the weather will make food distribution impossible. A bombing pause would allow food deliveries and prevent mass starvation. You can see why this line appeals to antiwar types: It sets humanitarian interests directly against U.S. military ones. "Avenging thousands of innocents in America," writes Jonathan Schell in *The Nation*, "cannot take precedence over saving millions of innocents on Afghanistan."

The key assumption here is that American bombing is the primary factor responsible for halting food delivery in Afghanistan. It isn't. True, some of the decrease results directly from the bombing—many truck drivers, for instance, are unwilling to haul food into a war zone. But most of the decrease results from the Taliban, which has forbidden aid workers from communicating with their superiors outside the country, allowed looting of aid offices, and arbitrarily imposed taxes on aid shipments or halted them altogether.

As the left-wing critics see it, the Taliban's crackdown on aid results from American hostilities (though their mistreatment of aid workers long predates September 11). But, even if that were the case, there's an obvious flaw in allowing the Taliban's anti-humanitarian thuggery to stop the bombing. Consider the chain of events: The Taliban halt food distribution, resulting in the threat of starvation, resulting in a bombing pause. The Taliban would figure out pretty quickly that they could stop the United States from attacking any time it wanted simply by stopping the food trucks.

The left is absolutely right to worry about famine. Its mistake is to see it as a reason to oppose the war. "The bombing should stop," argues Schell, "and a new policy—perhaps one of armed humanitarian intervention on the ground—should be adopted." Schell views humanitarian and military intervention as mutually exclusive. But there's no reason we can't do both. In fact, the more territory the United States liberates from Taliban control, the more food it can deliver to starving Afghans. In the long run, Afghanistan's four-year famine will only end when the Taliban disappear and a new government allows unimpeded food delivery and a rebuilding of the country's agriculture. Humanitarianism, then, requires more American fighting, not less. The pity is that the people calling attention to the plight of starving Afghans oppose the very effort that might ultimately alleviate their suffering. ■

Why Americans exaggerate the terrorist threat.

Bad Luck

By JEFFREY ROSEN

THE TERRORIST THREAT is all too real, but newspapers and TV stations around the globe are still managing to exaggerate it. As new cases of anthrax infection continue to emerge, the World Health Organization is begging people not to panic. But tabloid headlines like this one from *The Mirror* in London send a different message: "PANIC." A *Time*/CNN poll found that nearly half of all Americans say they are "very" or "somewhat" concerned that they or their families will be exposed to anthrax, even though only a handful of politicians and journalists have been targeted so far.

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This isn't surprising. Terrorism is unfamiliar, it strikes largely at random, and it can't be easily avoided by individual precautions. Criminologists tell us that crimes with these features are the most likely to create hysteria. If America's ability to win the psychological war against terrorism depends upon our ability to remain calm in the face of random violence, our reaction to similar threats in the past is not entirely reassuring.

In the academic literature about crime, scholars have identified a paradox: "Most surveys discover that people apparently fear *most* being a victim of *precisely* those crimes they are *least* likely to be victims of," writes Jason Ditton of the University of Sheffield. "Little old ladies apparently worry excessively about being mugged, but they are the *least* likely to be mugging victims." Women worry most about violent crime, though they have the lowest risk of being victims, while young men worry the least, though they have the highest risk. And because of their physical vulnerability, women tend to worry more about violence in general, even when the risk of experiencing a particular attack is evenly distributed. In a Gallup poll at the end of September, 62 percent of women said they were "very worried" that their families might be victimized by terrorist attacks. Only 35 percent of the men were similarly concerned.

Why are people most afraid of the crimes they are least likely to experience? According to Wesley Skogan of Northwestern University, "it may be the things we feel we can't control or influence, those uncontrollable risks, are the ones that make people most fearful." It's why people fear flying more than they fear being hit by a car. We think we can protect ourselves against cars by looking before crossing the street—and therefore underestimate the risk, even though it is actually higher than being killed in a plane crash.

People also overestimate the risk of crimes they have never experienced. The elderly are no more fearful than anyone else when asked how safe they feel when they go out at night. That's because many senior citizens don't go out at night, or they take precautions when they do. But when surveys ask how safe they would feel if they did go out at night more often, old people say they would be very afraid, since they have less experience to give them context. Instead they tend to assess risk based on media hype and rumors. "To be able to estimate the probability of an event occurring, you first have to know the underlying *distribution* of those events, and second the *trend* of those events—but when it comes to crime, people usually get both hugely wrong," writes Ditton.

The media is partly to blame. A survey by George Gerbner, former dean of the Annenberg School at the University of Pennsylvania, found that people who watch a lot of television are more likely than occasional viewers to overestimate their chances of being a victim of violence, to believe their neighborhood is unsafe, to say fear of crime is a very serious problem, to assume that crime is rising, and to buy locks, watchdogs, and guns. And this distortion isn't limited to television. Jason Ditton notes that 45 percent of crimes reported in the newspaper involve sex or violence, even though they only represent 3 percent of crimes overall. When interviewed about how many crimes involve sex or violence, people tend to overestimate it by a factor of three or four. People believe they are more likely to be assaulted or raped than robbed, even though the robbery rate is much higher.

Will sensationalistic reports of worst-case terrorist scenarios exaggerate people's fear of being caught in an attack? There's every reason to believe that they will because of the media's tendency to exaggerate the scope and probability of remote risks. In a book called *Random Violence*, Joel Best, then of Southern Illinois University, examined the "moral panics" about a series of new crimes that seized public attention in the 1980s and '90s: freeway violence in 1987, wilding in 1989, stalking around 1990, kids and guns in 1991, and so forth. In each case, Best writes, television seized on two or three incidents of a dramatic crime, such as freeway shooting, and then claimed it was part of a broader trend. By taking the worst and most infrequent examples of criminal violence and melodramatically claiming they were typical, television created the false impression that everyone was equally at risk, thereby increasing its audience.

The risk of terrorism is more randomly distributed than the crimes the media has hyped in the past. This makes it even more frightening because it is hard to avoid through precautions. (The anthrax envelopes were more narrowly targeted than the World Trade Center attack, of course, but they still infected postal workers.) Contemporary Americans, in particular, are not well equipped to deal with arbitrary threats because, in so many realms of life, we refuse to accept the role of chance. In his nineteenth-century novel *The Gilded Age*, Mark Twain described a steamship accident that killed 22 people. The investigator's verdict: "nobody to blame." This attitude was reflected in nineteenth-century legal doctrines such as assumption of risk, which refused to compensate victims who behaved carelessly. In the twentieth century, by contrast, the United States developed what the legal historian Lawrence Friedman has called an expectation of "total justice"—namely, "the general expectation that somebody will pay for any and all calamities that happen to a person, provided only that it is not the victim's 'fault,' or at least not solely his fault."

This effort to guarantee total justice is reflected throughout American society—from the regulation of product safety to the elimination of legal doctrines like assumption of risk. Since September 11 the most egregious display of this total justice mentality has been the threat by various personal injury lawyers to sue the airlines, security officials, and the architects of the World Trade Center on behalf of the victims' families. One of their claims: Flaws in the design of the twin towers may have impeded escape.

Given America's difficulty in calculating and accepting unfamiliar risk, what can be done, after September 11, to minimize panic? Rather than self-censoring only when it comes to the ravings of Osama bin Laden, the broadcast media might try to curb its usual focus on worst-case scenarios. Wesley Skogan found that when people were accurately informed about the real risk, they adjusted their fears accordingly. Politicians also need to be careful about passing on unspecified but terrifying threats of future attacks. In the middle of October the Justice Department warned that a terrorist attack might be imminent, but didn't say what the

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attack might be, or where it might strike. The vagueness of the warning only increased public fear and caused people to cancel travel plans. But it didn't make anyone more secure.

While Americans learn to take sensible precautions, we need to also learn that there is no insurance against every calamity or compensation for every misfortune. There is something inegalitarian about risk: It singles out some people from the crowd for no good reason and treats them worse than everybody else. But even in the United States, there is no such thing as perfect equality or total justice. If the first foreign attack on U.S. soil helps teach Americans how to live with risk, then perhaps we can emerge from this ordeal a stronger society as well as a stronger nation. ■

Why don't feminists support the war?

Arms Length

By SARAH WILDMAN

TODAY THE TALIBAN'S crimes against Afghanistan's women are well known. But, in the months after the party swept into Kabul in September 1996, the United States needed an education. It was feminists who provided it. Well-orchestrated public relations efforts, like the Feminist Majority's "Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid," kept the United States and the United Nations from recognizing the Taliban. And when, in December 1998, California-based UNOCAL broke off negotiations with the Taliban to build a trans-Afghanistan pipeline, independent observers noted that feminist pressure had played a key role. By the late '90s, feminist leaders claim, the State Department was receiving more mail about the plight of Afghan women than about any other issue.

Still, it wasn't until September 11 that the feminists' ultimate aim—toppling the Taliban—coincided with the nation's. Since then women's rights activists have garnered praise from across the political spectrum—even from quarters where "feminist" is normally a dirty word. *The Weekly Standard* ran a grudgingly admiring piece, noting that it is "not without irony that it now falls to Bush to overthrow the Taliban and presumably replace it with a government less repressive toward women. If he does, he will have secured the feminists' most worthy goal of the last several years." "I applaud you for what you're doing," declared conservative Fox News host Sean Hannity to a guest from the Feminist Majority. "I think it's important that the world understand what exactly it is that we are struggling with and battling here in Afghanistan." The only problem is, at the very moment feminists should be finishing the battle that they began, they are nowhere to be found.

Since September 11 feminists have been handed an unprecedented public platform. And what they've said is eminently high-minded—and largely irrelevant. Writing in *The Nation* last week, columnist Katha Pollitt explained, "Where women have education, healthcare and personal rights, where they have social and political and economic power—where they can choose what to wear, whom to marry, how to live—there's a powerful constituency for secularism, democracy and human rights." That's absolutely true. It also says absolutely nothing about how to dislodge from power the regime that is brutalizing Afghan women. Go to feminist websites and you'll find them urging the United States not to forget the imprisoned Afghan women, pushing for a constitutional democracy in post-Taliban Afghanistan, and vigorously supporting humanitarian aid for Afghan refugees. Yet what they aren't vigorously supporting—or even vigorously debating—is the one thing that might bring a post-Taliban Afghanistan into being: America's war.

Brand-name feminists have retreated to clichés about women and nonviolence. "Women are not more moral than men, or even intrinsically different from men," said feminist matriarch Gloria Steinem. "It's just that we have been raised without our masculinity to prove. We ... can come up with new and different solutions and end this cycle of violence and revenge." *Sisterhood is Powerful* Editor Robin Morgan urged women on the Internet to "[t]alk about the root causes of terrorism, about the need to diminish this daily climate of patriarchal violence surrounding us in its state-sanctioned normalcy." Barbara Ehrenreich and Alice Walker weighed in with similarly worded missives. And the Third Wave Foundation, whose praiseworthy goal is to "inform and empower a generation of young women activists," urged women to "unite in calls for a peaceful resolution to this attack."

But there's no logical reason that nonviolent means always promote feminist ends. In fact, even before September 11, some feminists had begun to suggest they might not. The rape of tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslim and Croat women in the 1990s led, in 1998, to the categorization of the methodical raping of women (sometimes with the goal of impregnating them with their enemy's children) as a war crime, punishable at the international war crimes tribunal at the Hague. That linkage—of violence against women with war—offered a momentous challenge to the feminist-pacifist equation. In the Balkans, says Swanee Hunt, director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, there were women who "called for military intervention in Kosovo months or years before it started, who would say—as I would say—that sometimes military intervention is the tragic best choice."

But this war, which should have broken that equation for good, has done no such thing. Even the laudable Feminist Majority has hesitated to unabashedly endorse the war effort—focusing instead on unobjectionable, but decidedly secondary, concerns like increasing humanitarian aid to the region. Feminist Majority head Eleanor Smeal does admit that she "can understand why there is some military movement." But that's pretty tepid language from the woman who put Afghanistan's women on the U.S. radar screen to begin with. Then again, she's fighting a different war—the war between women's rights and feminist dogma. And it's pretty clear which side is winning. ■

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The real danger is nuclear.

The Big One

By GREGG EASTERBROOK

RUNS ON GAS masks in major cities. Arguments about the relative efficacy of Cipro versus doxycycline. The House of Representatives temporarily relocating. As the war on terrorism enters its second month, fear of flying is giving way to fear of opening the mail.

Psychologically, it may be that society can only concentrate on one threat at a time. But if that's the case—anthrax letters notwithstanding—the focus is in the wrong place. Biological weapons are bad, but so far none has ever caused an epidemic or worked in war. And it is possible that none ever will: Biological agents are notoriously hard to culture and to disperse, while living things have gone through four billion years of evolution that render them resistant to runaway organisms. Having harmed only a few people thus far, the anthrax scare may tell us as much about bioterrorism's limitations as about its danger.

There is, on the other hand, a weapon that we *know* can kill in vast numbers, because it already has: the bomb. If detonated in a major metropolitan area, a crude atomic weapon—of the sort that could be carried in a truck or SUV—could kill 100,000 people or more and render the vicinity uninhabitable for years. In Washington, D.C., such an attack would destroy democracy's seat and kill most of America's leaders. Enemies of the United States probably have the technical capacity to make atomic weapons and have definitely tried to obtain the materials necessary to build them. And we know that if they succeed, Cipro will be of no use whatsoever.

The leading atomic threat is Iraq, which has been pursuing weapons of mass destruction throughout Saddam Hussein's ugly reign. Building atomic weapons essentially requires two things: engineering skill and a supply of plutonium or enriched uranium. Iraq appears to have the first and has made repeated efforts to obtain the second.

A crude atomic bomb basically consists of conventional explosives timed to go off in such a way that two units of plutonium or enriched uranium slam together, creating a chain reaction. That takes mathematical and engineering knowledge, but the basic process is no longer secret. A 1998 report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted that several college students have designed apparently workable models of atomic bombs, using only information from open technical literature. (Nuclear fusion weapons or hydrogen bombs are far more powerful than atomic bombs—a single nuclear bomb might destroy all of Washington and kill millions—but also far more complex, and therefore probably beyond the reach of terrorists and rogue states. Most analysts believe that not even atomic powers India and Pakistan have built nuclear bombs.)

ANASTASIA VASILAKIS

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According to the nonprofit Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, documents obtained from Iraq after the Gulf war included designs for at least two apparently workable atomic bombs—one weighing around a ton, and the other a little more than half a ton. The apparent goal was a bomb light enough to mount atop a Scud missile capable of striking Israel or Saudi Arabia. Currently Iraq has no missile able to reach the United States. But if Iraq could smuggle in the components, a half-ton bomb could be installed in an SUV, driven into Washington or Manhattan, parked, and detonated.

What is not known is whether Iraq has the plutonium or enriched uranium to fuel its designs. But if Saddam lacks fissile material, it is not for lack of trying. His opening move was to build, near Baghdad, a "research" reactor whose true purpose was to generate fissile material for bombs. Israeli warplanes destroyed the reactor in 1981. (The UN general assembly "strongly condemn[ed]" Israel for bombing a "peaceful" facility.) At the time, Iraq had obtained about 250 tons of uranium but, due to the reactor's destruction, it could not enrich it into a form usable in atomic weapons. Saddam has not tried to build another reactor, perhaps because he assumes that if one were built, Israel would attack again. But he did begin exploring centrifuge technology. Centrifuges can enrich uranium without a reactor and can, in theory, operate in deep underground bunkers secure against Israeli bombs—and the prying electronic eyes of satellites. Whether Iraq currently has an enrichment centrifuge is unknown. Saddam effectively barred UN inspectors from access to Iraqi weapons research almost four years ago and, since 1998, no UN inspector has entered the country.

In addition to producing fissile materials, Iraq may also have tried to buy them—in particular, from one of the former Soviet states. According to the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, the former Soviet states may contain as much as 20 tons of "surplus" plutonium and 500 tons of surplus highly enriched uranium—enough to fashion thousands of crude bombs. The international community has not pressured Russia for an inventory of its surplus bomb materials, so no one knows how much may be missing. The International Atomic Energy Agency has documented 16 thefts of fissile materials, but these are only cases in which the culprits have been caught. "Of what iceberg are we seeing the tip?" asks Matthew Bunn, a nuclear arms expert at Harvard.

Given this, it is hardly encouraging that earlier this year the Bush administration proposed cutting $100 million from the program under which the United States provides advanced security at former Soviet nuclear weapons sites. Bush has also considered ending a nascent program under which the United States would pay Russia to render plutonium inutile for weapons use by burning it at atomic power plants. Though the program is not without controversy, the chance that some of this plutonium, unburned, could end up in the hands of someone like Saddam seems greater than the threat of Saddam making fissile materials himself. The Wisconsin Project estimates that Iraq is at least five years away from enriching enough uranium for an a-bomb, but could assemble one "within weeks" of obtaining the materials on the black market.

Besides the fissile materials, Saddam has been trying to obtain the other components necessary to construct a bomb—sometimes with the help of our Western allies. Now that Iraq's oil export ban has been essentially lifted—the United Nations allowed Iraq to sell $17 billion worth of petroleum last year—Saddam has cash and has been spending it on the high-tech market. In 1998 Iraq ordered from a German company six lithotripsy devices, extremely expensive machines that treat kidney stones without surgery. Why did Iraq require lithotripsy when millions of its citizens lack basic antibiotics? Presumably because the lithotripter employs an incredibly high-speed switch modeled on the high-speed switches in atomic warheads. Justified as a medical purchase, Iraq obtained eight of the switches, one in each machine plus two spares. Initially Iraq ordered 120 spare switches, a figure totally unrelated to the normal operation of lithotripters, and one that should have made Saddam's real purpose unmistakably clear. The German company balked at the purchase order for 120 switches, but happily sold the eight.

WHILE IRAQ MAY be the state sponsor of terrorism most likely to develop atomic weapons, it is not the only one trying. Iran is completing construction of a Russian-designed reactor in the port city of Bushehr. The purpose is ostensibly peaceful energy production, but it could also be used to enrich uranium. In an overlooked statement released just a few days before the September 11 attacks, the CIA reported that Iran is actively trying to build atomic warheads. Israeli officials estimate that like Iraq, Iran is about five years away from being able to make an a-bomb. Lack of fissile materials seems to be Iran's main obstacle.

Then, of course, there is Al Qaeda. Here as well, the primary obstacle is obtaining the fissile materials. And, here as well, they are trying. In testimony widely ignored at the time, Al Qaeda member Jamal al-Fadl said in federal court last winter that he had helped Osama bin Laden's operatives arrange meetings aimed at acquiring black market fissile materials, probably from former Soviet states. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that last spring a draft report on nuclear proliferation by the International Atomic Energy Agency said bin Laden's group was "actively seeking" an atomic bomb.

If Al Qaeda or another terrorist group got its hands on plutonium or enriched uranium, it could do great harm even without the engineering skills necessary to build an a-bomb. A simpler "radiological device"—basically ground-up radioactive material entwined with explosives—would not flatten a city, but would spread so much fallout that thousands or tens of thousands would eventually die from radiation sickness. It is likely that more Hiroshima deaths—an estimated 100,000—resulted from eventual fallout sickness than from the blast itself. Health care has improved since Hiroshima, but there is nothing, like an antibiotic, for high radiation exposure: Physicians can only make you comfortable while you die.

One reason Americans may not worry about the atomic threat is that we lived through a half-century of cold war

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nuclear standoff, and neither Washington nor Moscow pushed the button. But much of the reason was "mutually assured destruction"—the knowledge that if one side launched, it would also be hit. That logic might well prevent Saddam from directing an atomic bomb at the United States or Israel—because he would know that the counterstrike would be horrific beyond words. (It is believed that during the Gulf war, Washington warned Saddam that if he gassed coalition troops, the United States would go nuclear; Iraq put its chemical weapons away.) But Saddam might try to escape retaliation by transferring a bomb to some hard-to-trace third party—Al Qaeda or a similar group—for anonymous use against the United States or Israel. And nuclear deterrence may not work if the enemy can't be found—if the United States does not know what cave in Afghanistan bin Laden is hiding in, even nuclear warheads cannot kill him.

More important, nuclear deterrence only obtains if the other side is rational. And many terrorists are not; they actively court death. Indeed there's an eerie sense that bin Laden is actually *pleased* that the United States is now bombing Afghanistan, because the ensuing civilian deaths might spark the general conflict between Islam and the West—and among Islamic countries themselves—that he desperately desires. An American nuclear attack, by Al Qaeda's grizzly logic, might be even better than an American conventional attack, since death would come by the millions.

All of which leads to a series of deeply unpleasant choices. Should we begin bombing Iraq's weapons plants again—just in case one contains uranium enrichment centrifuges or other atomic hardware? Should Israel bomb Iran's reactor now, before it can make anything? If Iraq is creating atomic materials in a reinforced underground facility, should we use nuclear weapons to destroy the sites? (Nuclear force would be the only way to be sure.) If we learn of a terrorist bomb being stored in a sponsor nation such as Syria, should we attack? What if Pakistan—which has atomic weapons—fell to Taliban-like fundamentalists? Should we immediately attack Pakistani installations?

In 1991 the first Bush administration let Saddam stay in power rather than extend the Gulf war. George H.W. Bush found it easier to postpone the tough choices and pretend that a nice-nice system of UN inspections would bring Iraq to heel. Through the 1990s, the Clinton administration similarly put off any meaningful action against bin Laden or Saddam, instead firing cruise missiles into empty buildings and watching as the Iraqi sanctions regime crumbled. But we know now—as we didn't before September 11—that our enemies will use *whichever* weapons they have at their disposal. And that means we must expend greater effort, take greater risk, and endure greater international condemnation to keep the ultimate weapon out of our enemies' hands.

In retrospect, the United States was shockingly unprepared for the attack of September 11—simple security steps might have prevented a horror. If an atomic bomb someday explodes on American soil, in retrospect it may seem a thousand times more shocking that we did not take other steps while there was time. We can no longer say we were not warned. ■

Gulbahar Dispatch

Playing Games

By ELIZABETH RUBIN

YESTERDAY, IN A field encircled by willow trees and surrounded by close to a thousand men of all ages, a dozen whip-wielding horsemen cantered around and into each other, grabbing after the carcass of a headless goat. A burly man in knee-high sheepskin boots, baggy woolen trousers, and a thick, black wool cardigan that barely stretched over his shoulders, hunched over the headless sack of goat he'd hitched between his horse's belly and his stirrup and managed to gallop to the edge of the playground, around a flag post, and back into center field to bulldoze his wild, dusty white horse through the others and drop the goat into one of the two pits that serve as goalposts.

The man was Nour Habib, commander of the town of Gulbahar. His horse is one of the best, worth $15,000, but not for sale. And the game is *buzkushi*, a kind of Afghan polo. It's thrilling and dizzying to watch. The men, their horses, the colored saddles, and whips are shrouded in swirling dust. Often you can't tell whether there are any teams or rules, which is why the game is frequently used to describe the politics of the ethnic Uzbeks. They're a Turkic people, mostly in northern Afghanistan, whose commander, Rashid Dostum, a rich, womanizing, old-time warlord, infamous for allegiance-swapping, is now in a pitched battle to wrest the northern town of Mazar-e-Sharif from the Taliban. The United States is supposedly helping him do that. But, for the past week, Northern Alliance commanders here—both north of Gulbahar, in the Panjshir Valley, and south in Parwan province around Kabul—have felt like they're inside a Buzkushi dust cloud, bewildered by America's military and political aims.

As the horses rolled around, scratching their backs in the dusty pits during a recess, Commander Habib said that the

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game was a good way of relaxing his men. "It's good for their morale," he told his audience under the boiling mid-morning sun. "It helps dissipate their anger and aggression." Since the U.S. military campaign began 17 days ago, commanders have been awaiting permission to retake Kabul, the ultimate prize. "If it were my decision I'd go to Kabul in an hour, but the decision is with our leaders," said Habib. But listening to the Dari-language BBC, or Iranian radio, or Voice of America in Persian, they've discovered that even their leaders are not calling the shots anymore. To them, once again, Afghan soil has become the staging ground for external imperial battles.

Meanwhile the soldiers wait. One evening I visited a command base for a mountain range northwest of Kabul. We walked up the sandy slopes followed by trails of children. A crimson sun set behind the range. In a cleft in the hills, I met a field commander and his young men—all of them welcoming and undyingly dedicated. Through their high-resolution binoculars, they pointed out tiny, robed Taliban soldiers, in silhouette against the night sky, climbing up and down a distant mountain ridge. A little further south, across the Bagram airfield about 35 miles north of the capital, every night this past week you could watch dozens of Taliban pick-ups moving supplies and men to the front line. Yet U.S. planes were nowhere in sight. Why, the commander asked, is America bombing Kabul and not the front lines?

It was something of a rhetorical question. It's well known that, since the beginning of the war, Pakistan has been pressuring the United States to avoid bombing frontline Taliban troops in order to prevent the Northern Alliance from marching on Kabul. What the commander really wanted to know is why the United States still supports Pakistan when everyone, he said, knows that Pakistan is the source of both the Taliban and international terrorism? Why didn't the United States bomb the terrorist training camps in Pakistan a long time ago or stop its *madrassas* from pouring out new Taliban fighters? "We're such a poor, destroyed country, that there are no real consequences for bombing us. It's cheap," the commander complained. "But if America really wants to get rid of terrorism in this region she's going to have face Pakistan." Everywhere I turned up this last week, the sentiment was nearly the same.

On Friday afternoon, the Muslim Sabbath, hundreds of Panjshir mujahedin packed in two Russian-made military trucks were stuck on a bridge in the Gulbahar, at the southern end of the Panjshir Valley, waiting for a train of donkeys laden with straw to pass. En route to the front, the fighters cheered themselves on by shouting to the men in the nearby teahouses and bazaar: "Long Live Islam. Down with Pakistan." To Western ears, these calls are a confusing muddle of allegiances and fractures. But to Afghan eyes, it is America's relationship with Pakistan that appears Byzantine and ruthlessly self-interested.

That became even more obvious the next morning, when an instructor at the military academy in Jabal Saraj addressed a thousand Northern Alliance reservists on a field littered with dead Soviet tanks. Their General Fahim, he told them, was on a tour of foreign countries. An Islamic council of 60 leaders from the Northern Alliance and 60 from the exiled King of Afghanistan's party would meet in Tashkent to decide on the future government of Afghanistan. Then he added: "Pakistan is the source of terrorism. Pakistan created the Taliban. Pakistan supported Osama bin Laden. And the president of Pakistan told the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell that the Northern Alliance should not be part of the future government of Afghanistan. We must fight not only with terrorists but with the supporters of terrorism." The crowd cried out on cue: "Long Live Islam! Down With Pakistan!"

And I heard the refrain yet again on a visit to another Northern Alliance leader, General Anwari. His office in Gulbahar is a two-story building perched over a river and overlooking a car mechanic's junkyard, equipped with satellite phones and a small black-and-white Sanyo television that was showing an old BBC documentary of the mujahedin struggle against the Soviets. Anwari is the leader of the Harakat-i-Islami, a Shia party of the ethnic Hazara, who come from the Hazarajat, the central provinces in the Hindu Kush. The Hazara's Mongol features, it is said, are the result of intermarriage between the warriors of Genghis Khan and the indigenous Tajik and Turkic peoples. The Hazara have suffered ruthless massacres at the hands of the Taliban. Fingering his yellow prayer beads, Anwari's deputy said, "After the attack in New York and D.C., the U.S. put pressure on Pakistan not to support the Taliban, and so they've created an open-minded Taliban." Is America that naïve, he wondered? There is no such thing as a Taliban who is open-minded or moderate. As my translator, an engineering student from Kabul, added, Taliban means student, but it also implies close-minded.

We had heard this before, and were going into a near coma from the propaganda and the heat, when suddenly an elderly man with Asian eyes and a wild laugh bounced into headquarters to see the general. He was, of all things, a professor of molecular biology, dressed in a black velvet blazer, a twill Scottish cap, and silk argyle socks. Speaking to me in English, Professor Ali kept referring to the unwitting men in our company as "those other fundamentalists." ("I bet they won't shake your hand," he said to me several times.) "I describe them as living in a vestigial state of evolution," he added with a howl. "It's fun to tease and fight them. They are just suckers and so boring. Aren't they?" he asked. "Admit it, I'm the first person today who's spoken to you honestly, no? We are completely beset in this country by extremists on all sides."

The professor lived and studied in Boulder, Colorado, for twelve years but, when he returned to visit his family in 1982, the Communist regime in Kabul wouldn't let him go back, so he headed up the medical faculty there. Later, when the Taliban stormed Kabul, he fled to Mazar-e-Sharif, where he established another medical faculty. Still, even the worldly professor knew who the enemy was. Whenever the satellite phone rang or the other men in the room fell into a discussion, he would lean over and whisper about Pakistan. "I am quite sure they are cheating your government," he said. "They know where Mullah Omar and bin Laden are. The ISI [the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence] knows every single hideout in this country, but they'll never tell."

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The next day, at the professor's insistence, we stopped by his university office near the new airport being built for the Northern Alliance. There he pulled out a map and began drawing circles with his finger. "There it is," he said. "It's one of only two places he could be hiding." He was talking about bin Laden. The region was called Shahristan, in the southern province of Uruzgan, where Mullah Omar was born, a region of high, inaccessible mountains with hundreds of caves—about 34 degrees by 67 degrees on a specialized map. The professor said he'd received information from his former medical students that they'd spotted bin Laden there 15 days earlier. "I read that five million dollars is the reward for people who offer information on his whereabouts. I could have gotten it but I was scared for my family. So now I'm telling you," he said.

There is, of course, history behind this hatred. The Taliban's primary recruiting grounds were the *madrassas* of Pakistan—in particular, the *madrassa* of Samiul Haq, a religious leader who has been a member of the Pakistan National Assembly and a senator. His *madrassa*, Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania, graduated at least eight Taliban cabinet ministers and dozens of Taliban governors, military commanders, judges, and bureaucrats. Located on the Islamabad-Peshawar highway, it has a boarding school for 1,500, a high school for 1,000 day students, and twelve smaller *madrassas*. As Ahmed Rashid, author of *Taliban*, has written, in February of 1999 it was the most popular *madrassa* in northern Pakistan. Haq sets aside at least 400 places for Afghans and 60 more for students from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, often members of the radical Islamic opposition.

"Haq is in constant touch with [Mullah] Omar, helps him deal with international relations and offers advice on important Sharia decisions," writes Rashid. "He is also the principle [sic] organizer for recruiting Pakistani students to fight for the Taliban." In 1997, Rashid writes, Omar asked Haq for help in the battle for the city of Mazar-e-Sharif. "[Haq] sent his entire student body to fight alongside the Taliban." The following year, through Haq's negotiations, a number of local schools shut down for one month and sent 8,000 students to Afghanistan. This support, writes Rashid, a journalist in Lahore and one of the most knowledgeable sources on the Taliban, is separate from the regular reinforcements the Taliban receive from Pakistan's government, its established Islamic organizations, and its intelligence services.

OVER THE WEEKEND I drove back into the Panjshir Valley, where the river runs fast and autumn is in full swing, to the Northern Alliance's Ministry of Justice prison not far from where Ahmad Shah Massoud lived. There are a few soldiers posted on the mud-brick square complex, but security is based largely on the prison's inaccessibility: To reach it you must wade through the river and then cross a suspension bridge made of narrow sheets of metal. Daily life for the prisoners mimics the *madrassa* schedule they followed in Pakistan, which is where most of them come from. They sleep 25 to a room, their narrow mattresses lined up side by side. From the log rafters, they hang their belongings: Adidas sacks, plastic bags, tea kettles, blackened cooking pans, bloodied beef bones on a string. They stack Korans of every size on small shelves. They wake up before sunrise for ablutions and morning prayer. The rest of the day is parceled out between fetching water, Koranic study, prayer, and meals.

The director—a doctor, comedian, and propaganda artist—brought in a slew of prisoners. They've all been detained for between two and five years. They have no radio, televisions, or magazines and, had journalists not begun showing up at the prison, they never would have known what has happened over the past six weeks. The first man we met was Faqir Mohammad Darwesh, who started his fighting, at 15, against the Russians. He had only had three years of school and said he couldn't read or write. He had one glass eye, permanently wide open with the bottom eyelid sagging, a full beard, a mustache, and robes. He'd met Mullah Omar when Omar was a commander with the Islamic Movement based in Pakistan. Yes, he said without inflection, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were good because they were done in the name of Allah. If any Muslims died there, that's OK: They were worshipping money and they'll go to Allah anyway. He'd vaguely heard of Osama bin Laden and thought he might be a terrorist but didn't know much about him.

Much stranger was Saluddin Khalid, a young prisoner with hyperthyroid eyes, plastic glasses, a long beard, dark skin, and brown long robes who, it was said, came from Pakistan. He sat forward on the balls of his feet and said very quickly in English: "I am a member of a fundamentalist organization called Harikat Islam. I was fighting in Khost province for two years and then in Kashmir for a year, and then I came back to Afghanistan." Then, after my translator left the room, he said very fast, "Everything I'm telling you is a lie. My real interview was taken by the International Red Cross. The number is 31930. I was a Sunni Muslim from Iran working against the government, and I escaped to Pakistan, where I became an Islamic master writing for the Islamic magazine. Because I was Persian they sent me to Kabul and I was surrounded by them. I hid my ID because I thought their connection with Iran was too good and they'd send me back. I never imagined they'd arrest me if I said I was from Pakistan. First they made me into an officer of the Pakistani intelligence services [ISI] and after a year I had to dish out this Islamic fundamentalist line, that I want to control Afghanistan."

At that moment my translator returned, and Khalid began again: "I am happy about the attacks in New York and D.C. America helps Israel with three billion dollars in aid to kill Muslims. We will continue our fighting in Pakistan and America with our secret cells and fight against the enemies of Islam." At first I believed him. But Daud, my translator, didn't believe the story, noting that Khalid's accent seemed Pakistani. He was, he surmised, probably a Pakistani changing his story to discredit the Northern Alliance.

Then there was Abdul Ghalid from Xingyang province in China. A thin man with a goatee and white skullcap, Abdul had first gone to live with relatives in Pakistan. In the late 1990s he then went to Kabul, where he attended an Islamic school for free, with a stipend from the government. There he

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learned not only the tenets of Taliban fundamentalism but also a modicum of military training and terrorist tactics. Had he not been caught, he almost certainly would have returned to China to ignite a separatist movement with his newly learned skills.

ON SUNDAY U.S. planes circled north of Kabul around the Bagram airport, then nose-dived toward their target, dropping two bombs each from their underbellies. All week long everyone had been complaining that the United States was refusing to bomb the Taliban's front lines. Now a new round of grumbling ensued: Why was the bombing so minimal? On Monday I went to the Northern Alliance side of the line, in the village of Qala-e-Nasru. El Harim, a commander there, was in his early forties and unmarried. His room at headquarters was decorated with cartoon-colored posters of Islamic sites and Koranic stories, and photos of his youthful days with the mujahedin, when he looked like a Hell's Kitchen biker in square mirror glasses, or standing in a field with Massoud surrounded by looming poppies. He led us through a minefield, on a narrow stretch of tread-upon dirt, to his perch in the trenches. There he polished his black army boots for the tenth time and looked 400 meters across the fields to the mud-baked Taliban buildings that housed his old friend, Sharif.

Sharif and El Harim grew up together in the village of Qala-e-Nasru. Together they went to primary school, shot their first Kalashnikovs, at 17 joined the mujahedin, and five years ago fought against the Taliban invasion on Kabul. Then, four years ago, Sharif joined the Taliban forces. It was inevitable, El Harim said. "He is Pashtun"—the majority ethnic group in Afghanistan from which the Taliban are largely drawn. Shortly before the United States began bombing Taliban positions in Kabul, Sharif and El Harim told their soldiers to hold fire. They emerged from their trenches and traversed the fields between them, meeting in the no-man's-land of Rabat. Sharif no longer looked like the man El Harim knew years ago. He'd lost an eye from a bullet fired by El Harim's men. His face was scarred and his leg damaged from stepping on a mine, laid by El Harim's men. Sharif asked El Harim what he and his troops should do. "I told him, 'Your time is over. There's no way for you.' I told him, 'You are with terrorists from Arab countries and Pakistan, and you should get out, join us, and save yourself.' " Sharif promised that he'd join his old friend soon. After two more meetings in no-man's-land, El Harim realized his friend was duping him to gather information about potential American attacks and the strength of the Northern Alliance. "I won't meet with him again. He's chosen his way and decided to fight us until the end," El Harim told me.

El Harim had his walkie-talkie with him and we decided to find out whether Sharif regretted his decision.

"Sharif, Sharif. Are you listening? How was the bombing last night?" yelled El Harim, laughing his head off. There was a crackling, and then Sharif appeared on the frequency.

"Our morale is high. The bombs are just landing in the desert. Besides this is not new for us. We've seen it all before from the Russians."

"How are the Arabs with you?" El Harim asked.

"There are no Arabs and no Pakistanis. We are all Afghans fighting for peace."

"Why do you hate Americans?"

"All of them are human beings. We never said anything against America."

"Why then did you attack New York and Washington?"

"It's not us. They have no proof for that. Islam says it's not good to kill anyone."

"Why are you protecting bin Laden?"

"Osama is a Muslim mujahedin. He never did anything. It's just lies from America.... It's not good to kill poor Afghan people without any proof."

"Why did you join the Taliban?"

"I am a mujahed Islamic soldier and because the Taliban are mujahed we joined them to finish the war between all these factions."

I asked El Harim to ask Sharif how he'd feel if he accidentally killed his old friend. Sharif replied: "I'm not your enemy and I don' t want to kill you. You should leave this front line and don't fight with us."

For his part, however, El Harim wasn't troubled by the idea of killing his old friend in a firefight. "He's no longer my friend. One hundred people of this village were killed in fighting in these two years. There were many from there and here killed and many dead bodies were in front of our house and we exchanged the bodies for burial."

IT WAS A late-afternoon scene from Breugel's harvest paintings. Silhouetted dusty mountains, russet autumn grass, and orange leaves. An indifferent horse grazed as American planes flew overhead. Shouting men led us up to the roof to watch the American bombs fall. In the courtyard below lay an unexploded rocket of a past war. Someone continued hammering to repair his kiosk. Children coming home from school stopped to stare at all the spectators on the street.

That evening we drove through the tunnel of golden-leafed trees that winds through Bagram village. The road is flanked on either side by mud-baked walls, which defend garden plots from the street. We climbed the Bagram air tower to the headquarters of the beefy, jovial, former Communist General Baba Jan, one of the savvier generals around. A storm was blowing in. Half the sky was black. The other half was illuminated by a quarter moon and a giant star. On the not-so-distant horizon we watched dozens of yellow lights making their way to the front line. "You see they have such confidence they don't even turn off their lights," one of Baba Jan's soldiers said of the Taliban. Baba Jan estimated that there are some 6,000 Arab, Chechen, and Uzbek mercenary fighters reinforcing the Taliban. The figure is possibly grossly exaggerated, but there are certainly some, and they've been amassing on the front line around the airport.

As U.S. bombers flew overhead, Baba Jan looked out of the watchtower, its glass panels now gone. He was gravely disappointed that the Americans were not even attempting to hit the yellow lights across the way—which should have been easy targets. And so he fired up his walkie-talkie and ordered his men to begin an artillery barrage themselves. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Chosen People

EARLY IN 1951 I visited Arthur Miller in Brooklyn Heights. I was then an editor at Bantam Books, which had just bought the paperback rights of *Death of a Salesman* from Viking, the publishers of the hardbound edition. The head of Bantam adored the play but felt that, for the reader of paperbacks, there ought to be more descriptive and connective material to make the characters more vivid and to clarify the time transitions. He knew that I'd had some theater experience, so he delegated me to go out to Brooklyn and ask Miller to make additions to his play.

"Thanks," I said with maximum wryness. The critical and popular celebration of Miller's play had been thunderous, ecstatic: I have never seen anything to equal it. At that time a suggestion to Miller of any emendation would be, I thought, like asking Moses for another commandment to clarify the first ten. Still, duty-bound to face ridicule, I fixed an appointment through Miller's agent and went out to Brooklyn.

Miller, who lived with his tall wife and small daughter in a pleasant house on a pleasant street, greeted me cordially. He introduced me to his family, then took me up to his workroom on the top floor. We chatted for ten minutes or so. I was delaying my suggestions while I figured the height of the window from the street below. It had occurred to me that my request might result in defenestration at the hands of this bigger man. But the moment of truth had to come. I took a deep breath and made the case for the general reader who had no special skill in the reading of plays, and I asked Miller if he would be willing to add some material at various places for the sake of that reader. I paused and waited for—I didn't know what.

Miller's face almost contorted with anguish. "But I *wanted* to do that," he said. "They took the script out of my hands, they published it before I could do that work. Sure, I'll do it."

With some personal relief, I expressed Bantam's joy, and added that we wanted to make this paperback edition as fine as possible. We had already been in touch with Joseph Hirsch, the artist who had done the famous drawing of Willy Loman—seen from the rear, carrying two bags. This Willy was on every program and poster. Hirsch had agreed to do several more illustrations for the paperback, an idea that pleased Miller greatly.

He supplied the additional material very soon, an aggregate of several thousand helpful words to be inserted at various places in the play. Hirsch did more excellent art work, and Bantam published "this readers' edition specially expanded by the author" in November 1951. A few weeks later Miller wrote to me that he thought the Bantam edition was "a first-class job."

Now comes the cap. Miller's additional material was not included in later Viking editions, nor in any other English-language edition that I have seen. Viking simply went on publishing the original version. Why Miller did not ask them to include his new material I do not know. Viking's fiftieth-anniversary edition (1999) has none of the added material, though the title page has one of the drawings that Hirsch did for Bantam. Miller's additions can be read only in that fifty-year-old Bantam edition, if you can find a copy.

This whole story came to mind recently because of **Focus** (Paramount Classics), a film of the novel of the same name that Miller published in 1945. In his workroom on that day in 1951, while I had been stalling about the point of my visit, he showed me a just-arrived book, a copy of the Japanese edition of his novel. I admitted that I had not read the book and said that I would do so promptly. I did, and though over the years I have admired some of Miller's stories more than most of his plays, I remember thinking that *Focus* was far from deft, a capsule of didactics with a thin coating of fiction.

Kevin Lascelles, the screen adapter, plunks the story before us like a 1930s dramatist eager to be socially engaged. The hero, Larry Newman, who is Gentile but whose name could be Jewish, lives with his ailing mother in a "restricted" New York suburb. In his forties, he now needs glasses. The glasses make him look Jewish—at least people in the picture say so. He is demoted from his very visible job in his company, resigns angrily, and has a tough time finding a new place because of his now-Jewish looks. In his suburb a newsdealer named Finkelstein is given trouble by an emerging fascist group; and Newman, who has previously kept well away from social issues, is now enlightened and eventually takes sides in the battle between good and evil. *Focus* may possibly do some good in less sophisticated high schools.

William H. Macy, who is one of David Mamet's favorite actors, plays Newman and renews my admiration for Mamet's loyalty, more than his judgment. Macy never makes a false move, but he never makes a really true one. As usual, his acting is well-intended but superficial. The director, Neal Slavin, has put the picture together as if he were following a blueprint.

I could not help wondering how Miller's novel had fared in Japan, back there in the 1950s.

Claude Lanzmann made *Shoah*. That four-word sentence, for me, is chiseled in rock. A monument, a monumental achievement. Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary about the Holocaust is more than a work to be praised: it is a gigantic block of evidence for future beings on this planet, more elevated than us, I hope, to show them some of the profound darkness that had been possible in the past.

While Lanzmann was making *Shoah* in the 1970s, he filmed an interview in Israel with a Polish Jew named Yehuda Lerner. Omitted from that work, this interview is now released separately as **Sobibor, October 14, 1943, 4 P.M.** (New Yorker). Lerner had been an inmate of Sobibor, the death camp in Poland, and was one of the survivors of the only successful revolt against German oppression—Jewish prisoners who, on the day of the title, killed their guards and escaped. Lanzmann did not include the Lerner interview in *Shoah* because he wanted to keep that film a consistent account of a monstrous devouring.

As film, *Sobibor* is simple. It relies on what is being said. There are some shots of places that are mentioned, but it consists for the most part of Lerner seated in a chair, answering in Hebrew questions that Lanzmann, unseen, asks in French. Lerner's replies are then translated into French by an unseen woman while we are shown English subtitles. This procedure could have been compressed by putting in the English subtitles while Lerner replied, but the story is so stark and is told

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by Lerner so plainly that it holds. Some of the time he almost seems to be smiling slightly, perhaps as he remembers what he was capable of doing when he was thirty-six years younger, yet slightly embarrassed at recounting heroism. One of the more telling moments is his admission that, after the killings and the escape, he made his way into a forest and, exhausted, fell asleep instead of fleeing.

I wish that the picture had explained how Lerner subsequently got out of Poland to safety. Still, as is, *Sobibor* is an important appendix to Lanzmann's work. ■

Damage

By James Wood

Half a Life by V. S. Naipaul

(Alfred A. Knopf, 211 pp., $24)

I.

Reflecting on the struggle of the writer, Balzac writes in *Lost Illusions* that "a great writer is simply a martyr whom the stake cannot kill." Such a formula looks excessive to a modern age; it seems a mixture too thickened by the blood, sweat, and tears of Romanticism. And Balzac sounds antique also because his drift is ultimately triumphal: the great writer must, after all, be stronger than the stake. Yet a modern suggestion can be extracted, perhaps, from an idea of the writer as one who, if never killed, is permanently damaged by the stake, of the writer endlessly showing an unclosable wound: life as a suspended martyrdom.

V. S. Naipaul is the obvious modern example of such a writer. He has written often and powerfully—and even comically—about damage; he has been damaged by frequent attacks from hostile readers; and he has written often about his own literary struggle, without caring to hide the damage that this struggle has done to his temperament. Indeed, he has implicitly and explicitly offered his own hard transit—from Trinidad to London, from obscurity to visibility (and now the Nobel Prize), from the rim of an already disappearing empire to its oddly disappointing center—as an example of a larger postcolonial passage. In a famous sentence in *The Enigma of Arrival*, which appeared in 1987, his autobiographical novel about that journey, he writes: "In 1950 in London I was at the beginning of that great movement of peoples that was to take place in the second half of the twentieth century—a movement and a cultural mixing greater than the peopling of the United States."

This "damage" comes on the wings of politics, but strikes at all the usual unpolitical places—the heart, the mind, the soul. Nowadays it is sometimes forgotten, amid the complaints about Naipaul's conservatism or worse, that Naipaul has written with great tenderness, even with radical anger, about the immigrant's damaged situation. In his work, certainly, the character who leaves the margins of empire for the center is not assured of victory, and may well be vouchsafed only pain. In *The Mimic Men* (1967), Ralph Singh, the disgraced Caribbean politician now in miserable exile in London, weeps for his solitude in an English lavatory. In one of the stories in *In a Free State* (1971), Santosh, a domestic servant, accompanies his master from Bombay to Washington, D.C. In Washington, he is homesick and bereft. He spends all his earnings on useless toys, such as a green suit. Freedom in America, he discovers, is to find that "nobody cares what you do"—in both the positive and the negative sense. The story ends with Santosh telling the reader: "All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over."

It is also too easily forgotten that Naipaul was once a great comic writer. The Swedish Academy may think that it is bestowing this year's prize on Naipaul's writings about Islam, but it should be rewarding *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). The familiar Naipaul character of the 1950s and 1960s—the anxious, striving, marginalized "little man" found in *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), in the early stories, and above all in *A House for Mr. Biswas*—was doubtless based on Naipaul's father, Seepersad Naipaul, a struggling journalist for the Trinidad *Guardian*, and a writer of short stories in his spare time. Seepersad, like Biswas, was a man damaged by the marginality of his status, which nipped the theatrical grandeur of his ambition. He was a fantasist; he lived freely only in his fictional writing and through his brilliant son Vidiadhar, who had done what he could only dream of: Vidiadhar had left Trinidad and gone to Oxford.

Seepersad's role as the model for Biswas was given new shape in *Letters Between a Father and Son*, a recently published collection of letters between Vidiadhar and his father, from 1950 (when Vidiadhar left Trinidad for Oxford) until 1953 (when Seepersad died, at the very early age of forty-seven). What was delightful, and delightfully comic, about the father who emerged from that book was that, unlike most ambitious parents, he did not squeeze his son for guilt. Quite the opposite. He did not even seem to envy his son his experiences, or to reproach him for them. Instead he identified with them so strongly that he warmly shared them, took them over.

Seepersad, it seems, was not really ambitious for his son so much as ambitious for himself; his son was an edition of his own rich fantasy life. It was Seepersad who really felt that he was at Oxford, arranging meetings with prominent people. When Vidiadhar tells him in a letter that he has not succeeded in properly meeting Professor Radhakrishnan, the professor of Eastern religions at Oxford, his father replies with an hilarious bustle of recommendations:

> I do hope you did succeed in meeting Radhakrishnan again. To get the notice of such men a "rebuff" or two is a cheap price for the privilege of an interview. And it is always the best to be quite frank about your position with such people. You could have said, in order to make conversation: "My father has always looked upon you as one of the greatest minds of modern India. He has often said he never understood Hinduism so well as when he read your book, *The Heart of Hindustan*." And you would have broken the ice, as they say. Contacts, Vido, contacts all the time. Let me go on. Suppose you had a fairly good chat with this great scholar, you could have described the experience of the incident to me in a letter—in a long letter, if that was

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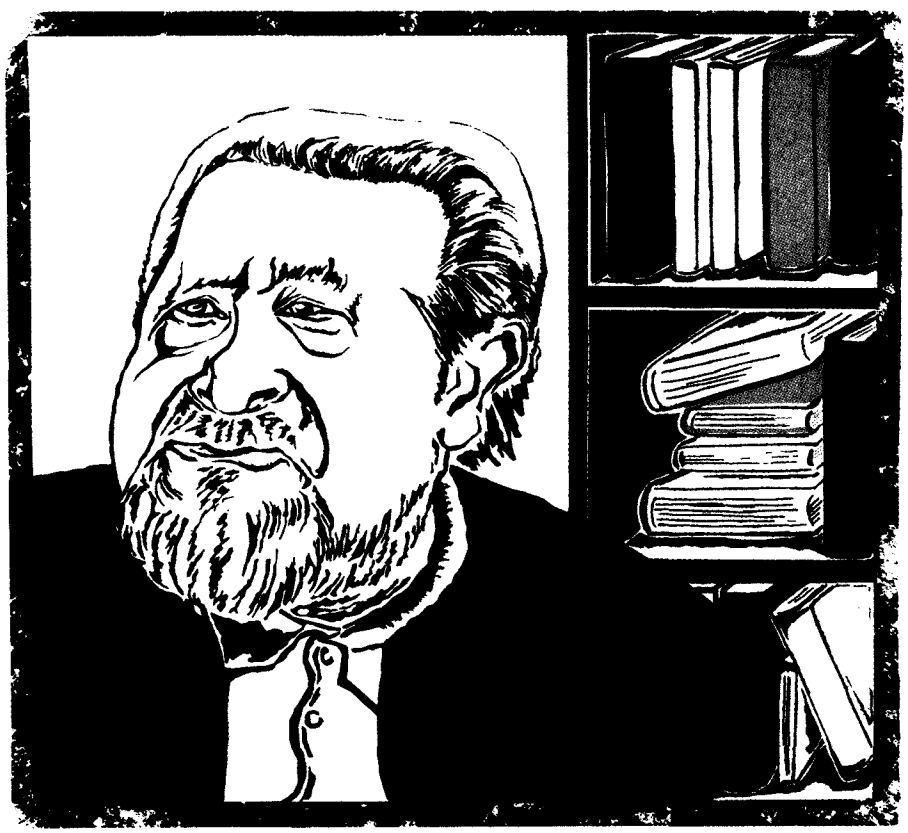
> necessary. I'd have delighted in the reading of such a letter, and I'd have kept it with other letters of yours. Write me weekly of the men you meet; tell me what you talked; how they talked....

It is hard to imagine that Seepersad could seriously be advising his proud, anxious, and precocious son to "break the ice" in this absurdly voluble manner. But Seepersad is serious, and that is his comedy, his poignancy. Nothing in *A House for Mr. Biswas* is quite as finely comic as this letter. It is as if Seepersad, in dispensing advice so freely and confidently, has already lived, in a previous incarnation, the experiences he so longs to hear about; his son is his avatar! And of course Seepersad has really lived these experiences, because he has imagined them so many times.

There is a nobility in this, a mental triumph. Seepersad emerges as a kind of victor of systems, because his fantasy is an army, running on a thousand legs. Seepersad, like Biswas, may be damaged, but he is also free, because he is most himself when traveling out of himself. Yet at the same time he is lost, for such a man could probably never discover himself, or merge with himself, or "find" himself, as if his singleness were a mislaid object. His self is a traffic of identifications and imaginings. He does not know himself because his intelligence is poured into self-fantasy, not into self-scrutiny; into self-dispersing, not into self-gathering. His identity is identification—the identification with possibility itself.

With great tenderness, Naipaul caught this aspect of his father in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, in which Biswas daydreams while reading the novels of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, and tries to use the word "bower" because he found it in Wordsworth (by way of the *Royal Reader*). The sadness clouding this novel is that one is always oneself even when one does not know it; one cannot escape that, and freedom is therefore always qualified. Freedom is a shout between two murmurs. Generous, combustible, nobly hysterical, facetious when he would like to be solemn, stoical in resolve but crumbling in practice, free in spirit but actually tied to the train of his destiny by the modesty of his ticket, Biswas is a very affecting comic creation, one of the few enduring characters in postwar British fiction.

The publication of the letters revealed, interestingly, that Naipaul took the essential flailing comedy of his father's "littleness" and consciously politicized it, thus quietly radicalizing his novel. Repeatedly, the comic encounters in which Biswas finds himself have a political dimension. They involve, in one way or another, Biswas's station at the edge of empire, at the margins of authority. (In his letters Seepersad gives little evidence of political awareness.) There is not only the reading of canonical Wordsworth, there is also Biswas's relationship to the authority of literacy: his first job is as a sign-writer, and his first piece of work is a sign advising "IDLERS KEEP OUT BY ORDER." Only after this does he become a journalist at the Trinidad *Sentinel*. A dreamer, he likes to read fictional descriptions of bad weather in foreign countries. Eager to write his own stories, he corresponds with the "Ideal School of Journalism, Edgware Road, London," which advises him, absurdly, to write about "the Romance of Place-Names (your vicar is likely to prove a mine of colourful information)."



V. S. Naipaul by Alexandra MacMaster for The New Republic

This apparently paradoxical combination of sympathy and pessimism, radicalism and conservatism, is what makes Naipaul such a difficult and contradictory writer. He believes in freedom, but only pessimistically, seeing it as at best a private treasure, to be spent in a world that is too coarse to recognize it. He has written again and again about his own journey from Trinidad to Britain—notably in *Finding the Centre* (1984) and in *The Enigma of Arrival*—and his subtle descriptions of this migration offer grounds both for political rebellion and for political complacency.

It was not easy for a young Trinidadian Indian to make his way in Oxford in the 1950s, and after that in London. While Seepersad was helplessly theatrical, young Vidia felt that he had to learn to perform a role in Britain. About a social occasion, Vidia writes to his father that "I performed (that's the way I usually do things) no blunders." Early on, in his first few weeks at Oxford, he wrote to his father: "The people here accept me." (Already, in a sign of how strange a writer Naipaul would become, this phrase of apparent humility before polished Oxonians sounds instead like the proud satisfaction of a conqueror among savages.) But the ghost of a rather harder assimilation appears four months later, in a letter to his sister Kamla: "my English pronunciation is improving by the humiliating process of error and snigger." Naipaul's pitiless account of the pain involved in such a journey, the "humiliation" of it, contains an implicit cry against it, which constitutes Naipaul's radicalism; but his obvious belief that the journey to the center is the only possible movement encodes a limiting conservatism.

There is, indeed, a sense in which Naipaul *believes in damage*, and it is surely this—with its attendant fatalism and its haughtiness of tone—that enrages his political critics. He believes in damage as the inevitable accompaniment of the inevitable struggle to leave behind one's

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origins—the rite of passage that he had to suffer in order to become himself; and in this feeling of double inevitability lies Naipaul's conservatism. Of course, it might be said that over the years Naipaul has treated the inevitability of flight from the margin to the center no differently than a Balzacian hero who must make for Paris, or than Henry James treated the inevitability of flight to London. But in postcolonial politics everything is fraught, and it is obviously one thing for James to condescend to his old America and another for Naipaul, the Brahmin Indian, to condescend to his old Trinidad. James was approvingly seen as following a path to the center of literature; Naipaul has sometimes disapprovingly been seen as following a path to the center of imperialism.

It is true that there are times when Naipaul acts as if he wished he had never been born in Trinidad, which is quite a different impulse from wishing merely to have escaped it. But in his defense it should be said, first of all, that he has in fact "spoken for the Caribbean"—in the political sense—in his tender and comic early works, and has offered a picture of the damage done to those unfortunate enough to be born in neglected places. And although in later years Naipaul has exchanged comedy for pessimism, has seemed to exchange Narayan for Conrad, much of his writing—especially about himself—reverses the Conradian journey. He is hardly the European who travels from Europe to the ends of empire, but its very reverse: he is one who has sought the asylum of centrality from those very ends of empire—one who, as he has put it himself, was born in "one of the Conradian dark places of the earth."

He is, in sum, a true postcolonial, where "post" must mean, in one sense, "anti"—opposite, reversed. Moreover, Naipaul sees it as his literary task to dramatize a condition, not to suggest its alternatives. In this regard, he does indeed resemble Conrad, for he is a writer whose eyesight is radical but whose vision is conservative. He knows the damage that empire does, since he has suffered it, and he sees it acutely; but he also accepts its terms, and writes within its grammar. He is a Conradian anti-Conradian.

II.

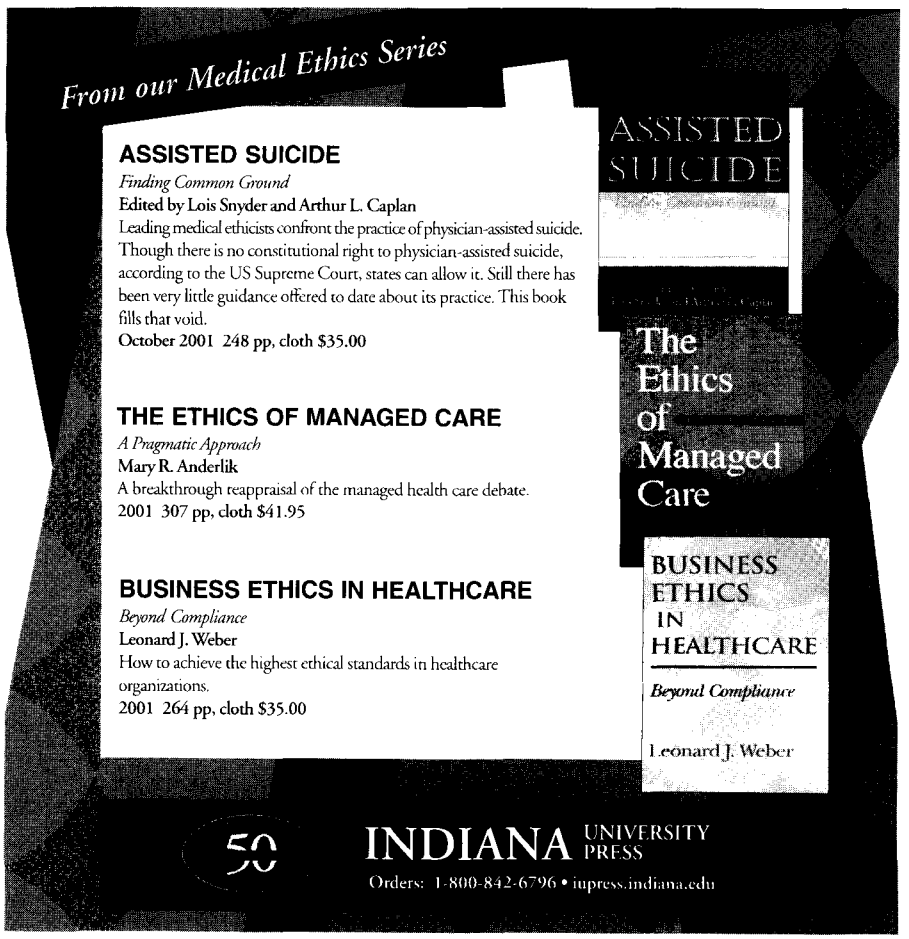
NAIPAUL IS AT his most contradictory, both radical and almost pathologically fatalistic, in his new novel. *Half a Life* starts grippingly. In the simplest possible prose, in sentences sapped of perfume and dried down to pure duty, the book unfolds its strange tale. One day, in India, young Willie Chandran asks his father about his curious middle name, Somerset, which was inspired by the English writer Somerset Maugham. In the course of providing that explanation, his father tells Willie his life story.

Willie's father was the son of a successful clerk and proud Brahmin. He was always difficult. At school, when his teacher told him to read Wordsworth and Coleridge, Willie's father decided: "But this is just a pack of lies! No one feels like that." Willie's father deliberately ruined his chances of betterment by deciding, in the spirit of Gandhi (it was the 1930s), that he should abandon his college degree and submit to a political "sacrifice." The sacrifice involved his choosing a wife from a low caste, a so-called "backward." He decided to "turn my back on our ancestry ... and to do the only noble thing that lay in my power, which was to marry the lowest person I could find."

Willie's father selected this woman; she was a fellow college student, a scholarship girl. He had no love for her, was indeed disgusted by her "backwardness"—her dark skin, her coarse features, her apparently primitive manners. "Her very dark top lip slipped slowly—with the wetness of a snail, I thought—over the big white teeth.... I was repelled, ashamed, moved." But he married her anyway. When their son, Willie, was born, his father anxiously scrutinized him, to see "how much of the backward could be read in his features.... Anyone seeing me bend over the infant would have thought I was looking at the little creature with pride." Willie's father tells him this amazing story over ten years, and inevitably Willie in turn grows up despising his cruel, cold father and eager to leave India. It is 1956, the time of the Suez crisis. Willie leaves India, enrolls at a college of education in London, and begins a new life there as an immigrant.

The novel is only fifty pages old at this point. The story of this "sacrifice," both cruel and masochistic, is tremendously compulsive; it has the compulsion of illogical logic. Like Stavrogin's similarly masochistic marriage to a low-born woman in *The Possessed*, it is a gesture that has the veneer of principle but is in fact pathological; and like Stavrogin's act, it is so abnormal that we read on simply in order to find a solving normality. But there is none, as Willie suspects: this is why he hates his father. Its logic was simply that, having been embarked on, it had to be continued to the end—a logic curiously analogous to the experience of reading (which explains the strange compulsion of Dostoevsky, and in this case, of Naipaul).

Willie's father made his sacrifice because of apparently radical, or at least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"progressive," impulses. He was inspired by Gandhi. But the vileness of his act, its unredeemed quality, lies in the paradox that he is not remotely progressive in his treatment of his low-caste wife. He is, if anything, more disdainful of his wife's disadvantage, more obsessed by caste distinctions, than he would have been if he had never married her. It is a paradox that runs like a fault line through the entire novel, and it provides its special richness of political complexity. For behind the arras of the apparently political, Naipaul suggests, lies the messy corpse of our actual motives; and our actual motives, often unknowable, may have nothing at all to do with the political.

THE BEST EXAMPLE of this is found in Willie's somewhat doomed life. As an Indian student in 1950s London, he suffers the usual "humiliations" of the Indian immigrant. He goes to see an editor at a large newspaper, and is treated indifferently. He begins to think that he has misjudged his father. "I used to think that the world was easy for him as a brahmin and that he became a fraud out of idleness. Now I begin to understand how hard the world must have been for him." In London, he cannot help noticing how much of late-imperial Britain is actually the invention of the merely recent past, and he begins to feel that the old rules of India—the caste traditions, and so on—no longer hold him: "the old rules were themselves a kind of make-believe, self-imposed. And one day ... he saw with great clarity that the old rules no longer bound him ... he was free to present himself as he wished. He could, as it were, write his own revolution.... He could, within reason, remake himself and his past and his ancestry."

And so he does, "within reason." Willie tells his new friends that his mother is a Christian, belonging to an ancient community of Christians. His father, of course, remains a Brahmin. Up to a point, Willie remakes himself. He gets on in the immigrant-bohemian society of Notting Hill; he writes radio pieces for the BBC; he has a brief affair with an Englishwoman who works at the perfume counter at Debenhams, a big department store; he has sex with a prostitute who tells him to "fuck like an Englishman." Emboldened by his success at the BBC, he writes a book of stories set in India. The book is rather condescendingly accepted and published; when it appears in the publisher's catalogue, Willie is presented as "a subversive new voice from the subcontinent." The reviews are foolish, and Willie thinks bitterly to himself: "Let the book die. Let it fade away. Let me not be reminded of it. I will write no more. This book was not something I should have done, anyway. It was artificial and false."

Here Naipaul revisits, yet again, the primal scene of his own "humiliation." Many of the elements in his memoir *Finding the Centre* are repeated in his novel *Half a Life*: the grim bedsit world of North London, with its watchful and prejudiced landladies; the confident Englishmen at the BBC; the thoughtlessly patronizing publisher; and the nervous, uncertain world of the immigrants. But Naipaul seems to be writing a very dark variation on his own circumstances. Naipaul's father, while he was alive, bountifully supported his son's early literary efforts at Oxford. Their relations were not uncomplicated, but they were warm. And Naipaul, despite ignorant early reviews, did not abandon literature, as Willie does; indeed, for many years the standard biographical account of Naipaul, in the front of his Penguin paperbacks, proudly announced that he began to write in London in 1954 and "has followed no other profession."

BUT WILLIE, DESPITE his freedoms in London, is finally unable to escape his father's negative obsession with caste. He has inherited it. And in imperial or colonial societies, where Willie now lives, an obsession with caste must become an obsession with race. In London, he befriends Percy Cato, a Jamaican of "mixed parentage," "more brown than black." Willie likes Percy, but he cannot help feeling, because of Percy's blackness, that "he stood a rung or two or many rungs above Percy." And then he meets Ana, a Portuguese-African from Mozambique (she had a white Portuguese grandfather), marries her, and goes to live with her on her family estate in Mozambique.

Willie at first dislikes Mozambique, and swears to himself that he will leave as soon as possible. "I must never behave as though I am staying," he tells himself. But he ends up spending eighteen years there, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. In Mozambique, Willie and his wife's friends form a society within a society: estate-owners and farmers who are higher up the ladder than the Africans, of course, but who are not pure Portuguese either. They are "second-rank Portuguese," distantly mixed-race, since most of them have an African grandparent. Slowly Willie realizes "that the world I had entered was only a half-and-half world, that many of the people who were our friends considered themselves, deep down, people of the second rank." Willie realizes that he has been helped in this understanding "by my own background."

So the son of a Brahmin father and a "backward" mother has made it all the way to "the second rank"! Willie knows perfectly well that a mere accident has turned him from being a patronized immigrant in London into a semi-colonial landowner in Mozambique: "By a strange chance I was on the other side here." In the last third of the novel, with terse economy and unsparing acuteness, Naipaul uncovers this second-rank world, this "half-and-half world" of braggarts and reactionaries and fakers, people who are very big in a wilderness but would be very small in an oasis, and who secretly know it.

Many of these people are incapable of conversation: "it was as though the solitude of their lives had taken away that faculty." Naipaul paints superb portraits. There is the mixed-race estate manager Alvaro, who overdoes his "educated" colonial speech, and says absurd things such as "He isn't, by the remotest stretch of the imagination, what you would call a gentleman." There are the Noronhas, to whom everyone looks up, because they are "blue-bloods," pure unadulterated Portuguese. Nothing in the book is finer than the depiction of the local "big-shots," Jacinto and Carla Correia. Jacinto, of mixed Portuguese-African descent, has money, and has educated his children in Lisbon—where he anxiously tells them "always to use taxis. People must never think of them as colonial nobodies." And behind and around this jumped-up and mediocre world, like a Conradian miasma, are the Africans themselves, who are vaguely seen from cars, endlessly walking along the sides of roads, with packs on their heads.

THIS LITTLE WORLD—which was not worth preserving anyway—is doomed. Civil war threatens. Already some of the estate-owners are leaving the country. As if it were not clear enough to Willie that his world is built on false foundations, one day, visiting a restaurant with his friends, he sees the pure-Portuguese restaurant owner abusing a black worker, "a half-African tiler," "a big light-eyed mulatto man." Willie says nothing at the time, but tells us that whenever he remembered "the big sweating man with the abused light eyes, carrying the shame of his birth on his face like a brand," he would think: "Who will rescue that man? Who will avenge him?"

Half a Life ends at the moment of Willie's decision to leave Mozambique. He is in his early forties: thus "half a life." But Naipaul means his title more blackly, too. Willie has lived only half a life because, of mixed parentage himself, he is only "half-and-half." And Willie chose to spend most of his life in colonial Mozambique, a "half-and-half" society. More deeply, Willie is half a man because his father's baleful shadow has cut across his life,

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scything it in two. Notionally free to make himself anew, Willie finds that in truth he is doomed to repeat the sacrificial frigidity of his father's life. Notionally free of the artifice of caste and race, he is in fact as imprisoned by it as his father, with the difference that at least his father chose to imprison himself when he married his "backward" wife, whereas Willie never asked for his imprisonment.

The repellent "sacrifice" of Willie's father had the peculiar effect of both undermining caste and simultaneously inscribing it more deeply in the fabric of life. By turning caste into a decision, a choice, Willie's father exposed its basis as artificial; but by making it a curse, to be handed on from father to son, it has been fatalized, turned into a pathology. Similarly, Willie has seen through all the old "rules" of race and caste, and has divined their artificiality; he has freely re-invented himself—but only to re-insert himself into a world of frozen class and racial distinctions. So Willie has had the freedom only to imprison himself. He has, in a small way, managed to "write his own revolution," but only at the cost of living conservatively.

And this is how Naipaul's intelligent, pessimistic novel works, too—intentionally, I think, but also perhaps in ways that Naipaul does not fully know. It remorselessly exposes distinctions of caste and race as nothing more than accidents, choices, and horridly fake rules; but its relentless attention to those very distinctions makes them seem pathologically immovable. It is this paradoxical movement between a potentially radical awareness of the disease of race and an apparently more conservative determination to insist on the permanence of that disease—it is this movement that produces the novel's powerful, shifting complexity.

This is a book that ruthlessly analyzes damage, but never breathes an undamaged air—and thus seems itself damaged. It seems at once a depiction, and a document, of damage. Its undeniable power arises from its evocation of a sense of waste—waste in Willie's father's life, waste in Willie's life. And behind it we glimpse the possibility of waste in its author's life: for sure, it seems a book not merely about, but written out of, suffering. Those who are suspicious of Naipaul's politics will trace the book's ambivalence to its author, and accuse him of the familiar political fatalism; they will see again a writer imprisoned by categories. Those more disposed to Naipaul will find a power in that pessimism, an ambivalence that contains the seeds of a cold compassion, even a political radicalism. For what Willie thinks about the abused restaurant worker might also be said, in angry pity, of poor trapped Willie, and even of poor trapped Naipaul: "Who will avenge that man? Who will rescue him?" ■

The Hero Worshipper

By DAVID THOMSON

Fire
by Sebastian Junger

(W.W. Norton, 224 pp., $24.95)

THERE IS A point in Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* where the old lady turns on the writer and asks: "How is it, young man, that you talk so much and write so long about these bullfights and yet are not a bullfighter yourself?" The writer admits that he did try it once or twice—on bulls with blunted horns. But the result was comedy, a travesty, so that "my decision was reached on a consideration of my physical ineptitudes, on the welcome advice of my friends and from the fact that it became increasingly harder as I grew older to enter the ring happily except after drinking three or four absinthes which, while they inflamed my courage, slightly distorted my reflexes." So he gave up on the corrida, and "as age comes on I feel I must devote myself more and more to the practice of letters."

Death in the Afternoon was published in 1932—a great book, but early Hemingway. More or less he carried on wondering whether "letters" could accommodate the unresolved matters of courage and death. It is this preoccupation that leaves some people uneasy with Hemingway, but it is likely that he shared the disquiet, and never really disposed of the old lady's

DAVID THOMSON is the author of *Silver Light*, *In Nevada*, and *Scott's Men*, among other books.

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question. Old women can be persistent and brave: they see through you. Hemingway shot himself one day in 1961, and I suspect that he was wondering all the way through the careful, tricky arrangement of his gun and firing of it (Norman Mailer worked it all out) whether he was brave or not to take matters into his own hands, or too afraid of madness, impotence, the loss of his taut sentences, the IRS, or just being a laughingstock.

A person can reflect too long on his own courage, until character drains away and he is just a stock figure in a naïve adventure. If he wants to be a real writer, as opposed to a crack journalist, Sebastian Junger is going to have to ponder this cautionary distinction between actual courage and literary courage. And he could start with his new book about fire, which was a strange concoction even before the fiery events of September 11.

IF ANYONE IS still unaware of his backstory, let me supply this information. Sebastian Junger in the late 1980s was a waiter longing to be a writer. He was in his late twenties when he saw a magazine photograph of forest-fire fighters. "There was something about the men in that photo—their awe, their exhaustion, their sense of purpose—that I wanted in my life." He got into tree-felling, and he wrote more. That led to the start of a journalistic career, writing about people in dangerous jobs. He got to follow firefighters on the lines; he saw trees burst open so flame ran out like liquid.

That led him to the swordfishermen of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the story of the *Andrea Gail*, lost in an exceptional storm in 1991. He called his book *The Perfect Storm*, just as meteorologists had used the term to remark on the spectacular collision of two dire weather systems. The book was published in 1997, and it became a best-seller and then a "major motion picture" with George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg as two of the doomed fishermen, and with computer-generated tempests standing in for storms that no one could see or film and survive. The movie was not well received: the storm was amazing, but the fakery was hard to ignore; and actors like Clooney and Wahlberg were so much smoother, so better treated and protected by life, than the actual hard men who lost their lives to the merciless economics of the swordfish trade. But the picture did well at the box office. And Junger was plainly a hit because of it.

To read Junger is to meet a decent, compassionate if not overly complicated man. He was stirred by the good fortune that he had mined in the death of those men, and he created *The Perfect Storm* Foundation to help the children of Gloucester fishermen and made two quite large (though unspecified) contributions to it. Now, four years later, it is time for a follow-up book, which turns out to be only the collected magazine pieces published in places like *Harper's*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Men's Journal*. So *Fire* is a little misleading: there are two reports on firefighting in the Northwest, including the disaster at Storm King Mountain in Idaho, but there are other pieces on the last hand-harpooner of whales, an incident with Kashmir terrorists, the ongoing stand-off in Cyprus, the war in Kosovo, the lethal diamond trade in Sierra Leone, and even one on Ahmed Shah Massoud, the anti-Taliban resistance fighter in Afghanistan who was assassinated just before (and maybe as part of) the events of September 11.

I don't doubt that *Fire* will sell well: it has a striking jacket front, with amber, orange, and gold bursting out of the dark; and on the back of the jacket there is Junger himself, rather better looking than Clooney or Wahlberg, with eyes that seem to have seen peril as well as the best-seller charts. The essays are short, punchy, full of fascinating factual research, and altogether very readable. Still, I wonder whether some readers won't come away a little queasy at all this bold boosting of danger and courage. For we have just had a lesson in the ordinariness of such things, and the simplifications in Junger's boyish hurry seem more naked now.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to *Fire*, Junger makes an important admission that turns into an inadvertent confession. "The stories in this book," he writes,

> all deal, in one way or another, with people confronting situations that could easily destroy them. I should make it clear that as a journalist I was not in their shoes; I was rarely in serious danger, and I rarely lacked a quick way out. I had my own fears to confront, though. Stepping off an airplane to work in a foreign country is one of the most terrifying feelings I know, not because something bad might happen to me but because I'm convinced that I'm going to fail. You have two weeks to understand a completely alien culture, find a story that no one has heard of, and run it into the ground. It never feels even remotely possible.

One day, perhaps, the American enterprise may learn not just how hard it is to understand an alien culture in two weeks, but also how many failings or handicaps that determined policy ensures. Nor is this over-confidence simply the ignorance of one journalist rushed into the cockpit of action. Far more, it is the decision of the American media to dispense with foreign correspondents on the ground as a matter of course, for half a lifetime. Those men and women may once have seemed the dull or semi-retired members of a dramatic profession, but they had advantages: they spoke the languages of their station fluently; sometimes they had married into the local community; and they had time to acquire respect for the nuanced history of something all too easily dismissed as "alien."

Far too often the media descend on these remote places, armored with equipment and videophones, and with the glamorous chic of a famous "anchorperson" or reporter, but without local knowledge or even the realization that it needs to be acquired if anything like sound judgment is to obtain. Consider how far those modern shortcomings may have affected the foreign service and even the military, and you have some explanation for the willful misunderstandings that bedevil international relations. The notion persists, even in a very patriotic America, that taped telephone calls giving significant clues to the events of September 11 had piled up and were waiting for translators. Courage, evil, wisdom, and poetry can all come in other languages than English.

HEMINGWAY HAD BEEN to the bullfights for years before he wrote *Death in the Afternoon*. That book is as good as it is because of professional knowledge and background, prolonged association with the people involved, and a good grasp of how the bulls represented Spanish history and culture. Junger seldom bothers with those things for more than a paragraph or so. For him, the history is something to be seized and nutshelled: "Fighting Afghans was like nailing jelly to a wall"; John Colter was "tall, lean, and a wicked shot"; "Why did one hillside explode in a chain reaction that was fast enough to catch birds in midair?"; "Ollivierre walked up the beach unassisted, his tibia showing and his foot as heavy as cement."

That is pull-quote prose, vivid but always on the edge of cliché or unreliability. Yes, the tibia was exposed (by rope burn), but did Ollivierre, a seventy-four-year-old harpooner on the island of Bequia, possess that command of metaphor or Hollywood writing? This is a quandary that haunts Junger, for very often he is not so much reporting as passing on stories that have been told to him, or that he has researched. In *The Perfect Storm*, Junger concedes that he cannot know what the seven fishermen thought or felt as their boat foundered. Instead he has talked to

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people who narrowly survived drowning, and then he imagines.

In that process there is much of value—like a thoroughly researched passage on what happens physically and emotionally in the act of drowning, so well done and so powerful that Junger might yet make it as a far better writer. But the fishermen in *The Perfect Storm* never really come alive as individuals. Junger does not do character very well—not because he never met those men, I think, but rather because he writes about heroes with a kind of awe and vagueness that begs Hollywood casting. In *Fire*, he is very good on the equipment the firefighters carry, and he is lucid and frightening on the exact process of being burned to death, but he just doesn't get the guys, or the women, who do it.

Junger was an observer of firefighting crews—he really was there—but not long enough, or with the right openness, to make them live on the page. Joan Didion's essay "Fire Season," written in 1989, is more useful and eloquent, because, living in Los Angeles, she saw fire not as exotic but as a part of life. Whereas you have the feeling always that Junger's chief emotion is a kind of aspiration or hero worship. So the people that he describes are models for himself.

REMEMBER WHEN HE first saw that photograph of firefighters, and how he wanted them in his life. That drive is made very clear in what is the most marginal, yet most revealing, essay in his new book: a short piece called "Colter's Way," written for *National Geographic Adventure*. John Colter had first been in Blackfeet country with Lewis and Clark. He went back, time and again. He once outran and outfought the Indians. He survived many famous ordeals and adventures, and in 1810 he retired to St. Louis and marriage. But, says Junger, "where the Blackfeet had failed, civilization succeeded. He died just two years later."

That is Junger at his dramatic best—fine adventure writing for boys. Yet it begs a larger question. We are not told how Colter died. We do not actually know, or have to accept, that the Blackfeet were the opposite of "civilization." After all, the Blackfeet felt that their territory had been invaded by people looking for wealth, and for things to steal. Colter might have died in a fire, or by drowning. He might have succumbed to cancer, or whatever. (Ulysses Grant was braver in death than in battle.) Yet Junger cherishes the easy irony in the formula, "where the Blackfeet had failed, civilization succeeded."

His real need to tell Colter's story is part of this sentimentality: "Given the trajectory of Colter's life, one could say that the wilderness was good for him, kept him alive. It was there that he functioned at the outer limits of his abilities, a state that humans have always thrived on." I don't doubt the sincerity of this, or even the passion. Nor do I mean to deny the need that some people have to live at extreme peril—whether facing the Blackfeet or waiting for the roulette ball to drop. But Junger goes a little too far. He wants this reckless urge in all of us. He is soon saying that "American soldiers at the end of their tour in Vietnam would realize they could not go back to civilized life and would volunteer for one more stint in hell."

He doesn't say "some American soldiers," and I would not doubt that there were "some." But I would love to know the figures, and without them I cannot believe that too many veterans of that uncertain war were so addicted. Junger then says that for the Colters of the world "the one thing more terrifying than having something bad happen must have been to have nothing happen at all." He does not define "nothing." He does not pause to say whether or not it includes an uneventful day with your family, talking, eating, reading, listening to music, walking, playing games, whatever. Junger does not precisely dismiss that casual happiness, but then the actioneer pounces: "Modern society, of course, has perfected the art of having nothing happen at all. There is nothing particularly wrong with this except that for vast numbers of Americans, as life has become staggeringly easy, it has also become vaguely unfulfilling." And there, I think, we reach a very important modern crossroads, one that could easily be the site for a military recruiting post, or an institution inclined to teach the ways of happiness.

IN A WAY, it is too easy, after September 11, to see the holes in Junger's thinking. But Jungerism is everywhere in our crisis, and it deserves some correction. I'm sure that there are, or were before September 11, Americans bored by ease, security, and plenty, people who felt the need for hazard in their lives. But as to the "vastness" of our society, I suspect instead that large numbers (try the majority) live with constant money worries despite that bull market that we had. That is because, like firefighters or Gloucester fishermen, they do jobs that pay survival money and offer no kind of killing break-out.

These people are troubled by loneliness sometimes, or by the suspicion that their close personal relationships are not as good as they would wish. They feel their marriage is rocky. They see their kids drifting away, reluctant even to argue. They hate the noise, the dirt, the inefficiency,

Making Good Citizens

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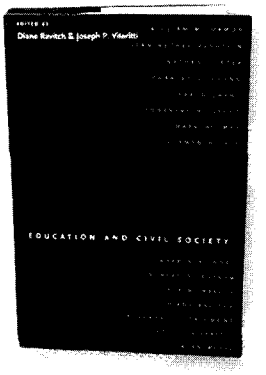

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the waiting, the bureaucracy, the trashiness of everyday hiatus in ordinary places, the humiliation of our "entertainment." Their homes are too cramped, too mean and too expensive, too ugly and too restricting. They may be sick, or subsist in fear of illness. But no matter how depleting or boring this daily strain may be, they do not want fuel-laden airliners ramming into their home or their philosophy. Next to that threat, they would settle for "nothing," or less, day after day.

WELL, SOME THINGS may pick up. We are back again in that season of military reports with wicked tracer lines illuminating the video mud, and sunburst explosions prompting cheers from the guys. We are trained in those long-distance video games, and their elimination of pain or damage. This is a process perfected in *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos*, in *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Terminator*. It has nothing to do with the "evil" of the film-makers; it relies on the way the media separate sensation from feeling. So you would do well at exactly this moment to recall, as vividly as you can, your own reality: think what one punch would do to you—how odious, how cruel, how shocking it must be. Now make it a commercial airliner slamming into your building, or a cruise missile, or whatever.

There were welcome lessons on September 11. One was a hint of what it is like to be bombed or bombarded, one of those life experiences that the United States has missed in the last sixty years (though we have often made it available for others). Another lesson is that firefighters and cops are not uniforms waiting to be filled by the likes of George Clooney, but men in whom humbleness and nobility are seamless. We live in a society of inadequately rewarded jobs, and now we have had instruction in what we owe to—and take for granted in—the uniformed guys.

Real firemen take their jobs not for reward or glamour, not to be part of a show called fire. They follow family traditions of work; they enjoy the comradeship and the duty; and they live with the anonymity. When asked, they tame their own glory by saying that it was just their job. They want to be like everyone else. They know that they are too plain, homely, or awkward with words, with "lines," to play themselves in the films that must come. They remind me of the firemen in what is still the best account of that job, Humphrey Jennings's documentary film *Fires Were Started*, which was made in 1943. The very title of that film affirms the nature of fire and the way it has always existed and is as normal as lightning hitting dry brush.

I prefer such common heroes, job-bound, to the Pattonesque glory-seekers. I suspect that we are more civilized in noticing the ordinary strands of bravery and fear than in setting up icons and wanting them in our lives. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier moves me more than the statues of Sherman or Henry V. And this is a proper warning to be offered to the chronic adventure-seekers, whether Sebastian Junger, Ernest Hemingway, or Ernest Shackleton.

SHACKLETON IS MUCH in fashion now, and he stirs me for a reason that will emerge. He is the central figure in a beautiful new documentary film called *The Endurance*, which uses film shot in Antarctica by Frank Hurley in 1914 and 1915. Kenneth Branagh will soon be on our screens as Shackleton. For the British especially, Shackleton has come into his own as a hero, just as his sometime boss, and rival, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, has been re-appraised as cold, confused, and a bit of a bungler. Yet Shackleton, too, is suspect.

Consider the skeleton of facts. From 1901 to 1904, Shackleton went on a journey to the South Pole as a merchant marine lieutenant to Scott. He was one of Scott's three-man team in a final attempt on the Pole, and it was Shackleton's illness that forced Scott to turn back way short of success. There was some blame, it seems, adding to Scott's feeling that Shackleton was a social upstart and a naked careerist. (Scott told himself he was doing it all for Britain.) In 1907, "stealing" Scott's province (as Scott saw it), Shackleton led his own expedition south. They got far closer to the Pole, and it was a measure of Shackleton's judgment and leadership that he turned away when only a hundred miles short. That caution was underlined a few years later when Scott and four others died on their way back from the Pole, eleven miles short of a provisions depot.

Then in 1914, days before the outbreak of the Great War, Shackleton went south once more. Why? Well, there was some difficulty in answering that question. The Norwegian Roald Amundsen had "discovered" the Pole. Scott had made it there next, and he had had his sad photograph taken there. What else was there to do in the white wilderness? So Shackleton invented the challenge of walking all the way across the Antarctic mainland simply because it was there.

He never came close to facing that task. His ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped and crushed in the ice. His men scrambled to make land on Elephant Island, but they were beyond rescue. So Shackleton and a few others took an open boat, the *James Caird*, and did the eight-hundred-mile journey in heavy seas to South Georgia, where whaling stations allowed rescue.

It was a triumph of courage and endeavor, and it meant that Shackleton lost not one man. But Shackleton returned to that enormous world war. He was not forgotten, but he was not the right hero for the moment. The *James Caird* was kept in a cage, behind the boiler room, on the grounds of Dulwich College (Shackleton's old school). I was a pupil there in the 1950s, but we took the shabby boat for granted. I was more impressed that P.G. Wodehouse, Raymond Chandler, and Michael Powell had also been to the school.

Not that Shackleton was done with. In 1919, he turned south yet again. This time he could not summon a single reason. He never told his men what the goal of the trip might be. He left a wife, a family, and a mistress. He was helpless; he had to have the danger, or the escape, in his life. "Sometimes I think I am no good at anything but being away in the wilds just with men," he wrote to his wife. He died of a heart attack in the Antarctic. His wife sent word: don't bring the body back, bury him there.

And now Shackleton's time for atten-

Orphanotrophium

Six o'clock and the sky still there.
A little life at bay on the stairway,
a lesson in white with some red
added for conduct disorderly—

according to matrons and patrons.

No schoolbook says a piece of ice
can scrape and slit bloodlessly
through second-hand words we wear
regardless of tongue and tie.

Then how to speak languages fluently?

A tilt of the head to separate
the lung from all the colored marbles
in the mouth will cover your tracks,
blow dust in the courtyard.

Dorothea Tanning

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tion has come. Which is all very well, for it takes courage to leave wife and family, just as it takes courage to handle an open boat in wild seas. But such adventuring is a romantic gesture, too, a kind of escapism, a special pleading that some of us deserve to be excused from the plain, dull duties of ordinary life, which anyway culminate in waiting for death. So it is about time that we agreed on the virtue of such a patient acceptance of quotidian existence, and did what we could to aim our culture towards this acceptance (with some happiness along the way, why not?), instead of determining in advance that we are danger addicts, and ready to live on the edge. After all, the culture of the edge is a kind of superiority, even a form of fascism. And no one knows when danger will appear out of boredom. ■

Flawed Perfection

By CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay by Nancy Milford

(Random House, 553 pp., $29.95)

What Lips My Lips Have Kissed: The Loves and Love Poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay by Daniel Mark Epstein

(Henry Holt, 300 pp., $26)

EDNA MILLAY GOT her vivid and aristocratic-sounding middle name from the hospital in New York City that saved her Uncle Charlie's life. Drunk on the New Orleans waterfront, Charles Buzzell boarded a ship while it was loading grain and fell asleep on a bale of cotton in the hold. He woke to find himself pinned below deck, out of earshot and unable to move. After ten days without food or water, he saw a bright light expanding suddenly in the black hull, "& I could see through the ship as though it was made of clear glass." Rushed to St. Vincent's, he was convinced forever after that he had entered the spirit world and been reborn. He began to appear at the Globe Museum on the Bowery as "The Adventurer and Evangelist Chas. A. Buzzell, The New Orleans Stowaway." Six days after his miraculous rebirth, Edna St. Vincent Millay—nicknamed "Vincent" almost immediately—was born on Washington's birthday, February 22, 1892, in Camden, Maine.

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Millay's parents were so badly matched that, as her mother Cora wryly remarked, "any crank on Eugenics would have said we were perfectly mated for the propagation of a family." Henry Millay liked to fish, to play poker, and to drink. When his industrious wife complained about his inability to hold a job, he beat her. Cora finally kicked him out in 1900, when Edna turned eight, and raised her three daughters—one blonde, one brunette, and one redhead (Edna, the eldest)—alone. A hairdresser and a self-taught nurse, she found occasional work in neighboring towns, often leaving the girls to their own devices.

Under their mother's tutelage, all the girls played the piano, wrote poetry, and acted. Cora Millay had a bohemian strain intertwined with aristocratic pretensions, a sometimes unattractive combination that she passed on to her eldest daughter. When a *New Yorker* profile in 1925 harped on Edna Millay's humble beginnings, her mother sent in a haughty correction: "Certain Millays owned houses and lands—but that was long ago." Still, as Cora remarked with equal pride in an interview, "The hardships that bound the children together made them stronger, and banded them together in self-defense against the world.... I let the girls realize their poverty." That use of "realize" is nicely turned. In her best poetry it can be said that Edna Millay realized—acknowledged even as she made something real and lasting from—her poverty.

MILLAY'S CHILDHOOD IS a story of precocious virtuosity. She excelled at everything, and was always the leading lady in the school play, the class poet (except once, when her classmates, tired of her queenly ways, voted for the class dullard), the star. Music and poetry were her refuge from the daily grind of keeping house in ever more modest rented rooms along the rocky Maine coast. Nancy Milford, in the moving opening section of her painstaking and sympathetic biography, cites a poignant memory of Millay searching for a chord on the organ, and asking her exhausted mother for help.

> We did not have the notes of it, it was something she knew by heart. I called her to help me with the chord, and she came in. She had been doing washing, and her hands, as she placed them upon the keys[,] were very pink, and steam rose from them. Her plain gold wedding ring shone very clean and bright, and there were little bubbles on it which the soap suds had left, pink, and yellow, and pale green. When she had gone and I was sure that she would not hear me, I laid my cheek softly down upon the cool keys and wept. For it had come into my mind with dreadful violence as she bent above me and placed her fingers upon the keys ... that my mother could die; and I wanted to save her from that, for I knew she would not like it; and I knew that I could not.

Poetry also came from Cora. "Mother gave me poetry," Millay wrote. Her discovery of the physical thrill of poetry was a perfect match for Emily Dickinson's famous statement that "if I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry." Millay said of her own first encounter with poetry: "I know that it knocked the wind clear out of me, and left me giddy and almost actively sick ... when, on opening at random my mother's gargantuan copy of Shakespeare, I read the passage from *Romeo and Juliet* about the 'dateless bargain' and Death keeping Juliet as beautiful as she was in life, to be his 'paramour.'" She began writing poems early, and perhaps too early learned to meet perfectly the editorial expectations of the popular children's magazine *St. Nicholas*. By the time she was eighteen, the cut-off age for submissions, she had won every poetry contest that the magazine offered. The

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awareness that poetry was a matter of prizes and editors as much as a giddy and gut-wrenching experience set her on the path of a big career—but one sometimes wishes that her eyes had not always been so firmly locked on the prize.

By her twentieth birthday, in 1912, Millay had written the first half of a masterpiece, the claustrophobic "Renascence," which recalls in its hammering tetrameters both her hemmed-in Maine childhood landscape and her Uncle Charlie's below-deck ordeal:

> All I could see from where I stood
> Was three long mountains and a wood;
> I turned and looked another way,
> And saw three islands in a bay.
> So with my eyes I traced the line
> Of the horizon, thin and fine,
> Straight around till I was come
> Back to where I'd started from;
> And all I saw from where I stood
> Was three long mountains and a wood.

Two hundred lines or so detail this circular feeling of boundedness. "The sky, I thought, is not so grand; / I 'most could touch it with my hand! / And reaching up my hand to try, / I screamed, to feel it touch the sky."

What saves the poem from bathos is a verbal dexterity and self-mocking wit that is never far from light verse, as well as such Tin Pan Alley tricks as placing the reached-for rhyme first. The ending of the poem perfectly skirts the edge between grandiosity and a nimble tread:

> The world stands out on either side
> No wider than the heart is wide;
> Above the world is stretched the sky,—
> No higher than the soul is high.
> The heart can push the sea and land
> Farther away on either hand;
> The soul can split the sky in two,
> And let the face of God shine through.
> But East and West will pinch the heart
> That can not keep them pushed apart;
> And he whose soul is flat—the sky
> Will cave in on him by and by.

Those last four lines, with the skittish dash and the culminating throwaway "by and by," could hardly be improved upon.

"Renascence," the title poem of Millay's first book, which appeared in 1912, was in the running for a big prize given by *The Lyric Year*. The much-publicized indignation of critics such as Louis Untermeyer, protesting Millay's honorable mention, was worth more to her reputation than winning would have been. The poem and the controversy also brought Millay a more discerning audience and more powerful patrons than her childhood submissions to *St. Nicholas*. The wealthy Caroline Dow, dean of the YWCA Training School in New York City, heard her recite "Renascence" at a party and offered to pay her way through Vassar, which Millay entered, four years older than her classmates, in 1913. It was at Vassar that the Millay legend can truly be said to have begun. A diminutive five-foot-one, never weighing more than a hundred pounds, she stood out, with her flame-red hair, waist-length as a child but pinned up at Vassar, her complementary green eyes, her trained voice, and her sexual swagger that combined a New Woman androgyny with an aristocratic remove.

The ostensible subject of Daniel Mark Epstein's breezy and carelessly written book—on a single page he manages to include the clichés "from the moment he laid eyes on her," "would not take no for an answer," and "went toe to toe with"—is Millay's "loves and love poems"; and Vassar gives him his first cast of characters. Epstein is fascinated by Millay's "megawatt libido" and her "harem of sex-starved Vassar girls eager for same-sex experiments right there on campus." Calling Millay "the Sappho of North Hall," he quotes liberally from love letters sent to her: "I think of you when I brush my teeth because I use the same kind of toothpaste that you do—I think of you when I bathe—for obvious reasons." Shifting gears from the prurient to the therapeutic, Epstein ascribes the "element of androgyny" in Millay's temperament and erotic life to her poetic ambition, "the cultivation of a multitude of rich voices from a profound and androgynous emotional center. If the male in her was not so firmly in touch with the female, she could never have written so insightfully of men and women in love."

This getting-in-touch-with-her-male-side stuff misses the transgressive excitement of Millay's Vassar. Millay's tastes at this time encompassed both athletic women—she described one of her lovers as "another hockey hero, cheerleader, rides horseback a lot, very boyish, not tall, but *all* muscle"—and effeminate men. While indulging in "both serial and simultaneous sexual relations with Katharine Tilt, Catherine Filene, Isobel Simpson, and Elaine Ralli," she also maintained an off-campus affair with an international man of mystery called Arthur Hooley. Unknown to previous biographers, Hooley was a man of disguises and aliases, shifting identities and addresses. Epstein thinks that Hooley had "something to hide" and suggests, credibly, that this something was homosexuality. He let her touch him only in the dark. "There in the darkness he would let her have her way with him," Epstein writes, "and he might use her in the way he would use a wicked little schoolboy who would not do as he had been told." "Might" marks the speculation in this passage.

From Vassar—where her myth lived on, to be apotheosized, some people believe, in the lesbian character Lakey in Mary McCarthy's *The Group*—Millay graduated to the world of Greenwich Village and its bohemia. The most eloquent witness of this period of her life is Edmund Wilson, who saw a performance of her anti-war play *Aria da Capo* early in 1920, and met her at a post-performance party downtown.

> She was dressed in some bright batik, and her face lit up with a flush that seemed to burn also in the bronze reflections of her not yet bobbed reddish hair. She was one of those women whose features are not perfect and who in their moments of dimness may not seem even pretty, but who, excited by the blood or the spirit, become almost supernaturally beautiful. She was small, but her figure was full, though she did not appear plump. She had a lovely and very long throat that gave her the look of a muse, and her reading of her poetry was thrilling.

Wilson was twenty-five at the time, and had never slept with a woman. Like many of Millay's lovers before and after, Wilson thought he was seducing her until he felt the hook in his mouth. Wilson's friend and colleague at *Vanity Fair*, the poet John Peale Bishop, swallowed the bait as well. In one scene played for comedy in both biographies, Bishop and Wilson joined Millay in bed, and divided her body at the waist between them—"with a polite exchange of pleasantries about which had the better share," Wilson recalled. (He chose below the waist.) Epstein, half-jokingly, suggests such scenes might have been the source of Millay's Jazz Age quatrain "My candle burns at both ends."

In his poignant and clear-eyed "Epilogue, 1952," which concludes *The Shores of Light*, Wilson tells how their friendship survived Millay's refusal of his marriage proposal. Milford, who insists on calling him Edmund Wilson, Jr., has found things in his diary not included in the memoir. When Wilson told Millay, "By the time we're fifty years old, we'll be two of the most interesting people in the United States," she replied, "You behave as if you were fifty already." But his mature presence was calming and restorative during a period when Millay was drinking heavily and going through lovers with apparent desperation. In a body of poetry in which almost no particular people are identifiable, Millay's "Portrait" is a gentle gesture

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of thanks to Wilson for hours spent in his company seriously discussing literature:

> I could not ever nor can I to this day
> Acquaint you with the triumph and the sweet rest
> These hours have brought to me and always bring—
> Rapture, coloured like the wild bird's neck and wing,
> Comfort, softer than the feathers of its breast.

GREENWICH VILLAGE IN the 1920s was leftist, of course, and Millay moved weightlessly among the "Reds" circles of Max Eastman and John Reed. In the summer of 1927, she wrote a once-famous poem in protest of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, "Justice Denied in Massachusetts," and managed to get herself arrested at a picket line at the Boston State House. The five-stanza poem, which employs, like *The Waste Land*, symbolist evocations of a blighted harvest, appeared in the New York *World* on August 22 and created a sensation.

> What from the splendid dead
> We have inherited—
> Furrows sweet to the grain, and the weed subdued—
> See now the slug and the mildew plunder.
> Evil does overwhelm
> The larkspur and the corn;
> We have seen them go under.

Despite the occasion and the *parti pris*, Millay's deepest instincts were hardly populist; as a propagandist, here and in the saber-rattling poems she wrote during the early years of World War II against American neutrality, she is always too much the poised and self-righteous performer. Aristocratic and apolitical, she hated the Nazis because they were vulgar and invaded civilized countries. A Cinderella who had, at least in wish, left the ashes and her two less-lucky sisters far behind her, she loved expensive gowns (ever present in her poems and her closets), champagne, English accents, and English men.

"She seemed sometimes rather British than American," Edmund Wilson wrote, "... in her quick way of talking to people as well as in her reading of her poems." As a child she fantasized about having a black mammy. Late in life she owned an estate in Columbia County, New York, and—this is the major discovery of Epstein's book—a stable of racehorses in Maryland that consumed the cash she made on her diva-like tours. (To warm up her voice she would recite the winners of the Kentucky Derby from 1875 onward.) Her marriage to a Dutch sugar importer named Eugen Boissevain, whom a close friend described as behaving "like a cruise director," gave her in the final decades of her life the stability and the European air that she required.

THE NARRATIVE OF those years, in Milford's detailed and forgiving treatment, has a ghoulish fascination, as Millay killed herself slowly and then, in a headlong pitch down a flight of stairs, once and for all. Three accidents marred her years with Boissevain. There was, first of all, her chance encounter in Chicago with a twenty-one-year-old poet named George Dillon, with whom she fell desperately in love. Their affair—with her in the driver's seat and him, timid and passive and probably gay, curled up in back—gave her material for the fifty-two sonnets of *Fatal Interview*, which many consider her finest work. Its mock-Elizabethan pastiches show a kind of perverse genius. I would challenge poets and English professors not familiar with Millay to name the century of lines like these: "Nay, learned doctor, these fine leeches fresh/ From the pond's edge my cause cannot remove:/Alas, the sick disorder in my flesh/Is deeper than your skill, is very love...."

In 1936 she lost the manuscripts of two books in a fire in a hotel in Florida. A couple of years later she was thrown from a moving car, suffering a back injury that was treated with large doses of morphine. By 1940 she was holed up in the upstairs rooms of Steepletop, her upstate New York estate, dosing herself heavily with morphine, alcohol, and cigarettes. On New Year's Eve, she filled out a medical chart in her notebook. The first two entries are unexceptional: "Awoke 7:30, after untroubled night. Pain less than previous day. 7:35—Urinated—no difficulty or distress." And then:

> 7:40—¼ gr. M.S. [morphine] hypodermically, self-administered in left upper arm + profuse bleeding, almost instantly quenched.
> 7:45 to 8—smoked cigarette (Egyptian) (mouth burns from excessive smoking)
> 8:15—thirsty—went to ice-box for glass of water, but no water there. Take glass of beer instead which do not want. Headache, lassitude and feeling of discomfort & stuffiness from constipation.
> 8:20—cigarette (Egyptian)
> 9:00—"
> 9:30—Gin Rickey (cigarette)
> 11:15—Gin Rickey
> 12:15—Martini (4 cigarettes)
> 12:45—¼ grain M.S. & cigarette
> 1—pain bad & also in lumbar region. No relief from M.S.

This deadpan record of five hours of torment is worthy of William Burroughs, or Baudelaire.

The final chapters of Milford's book read like one of Willa Cather's bitter portraits of gifted women in decline. Indeed, Boissevain's male-nurse ministrations to Millay bear an eerie resemblance to Oswald's well-meaning but ultimately unbearable care for Myra in *My Mortal Enemy*. During the early morning of October 19, 1950, unable to sleep, she smoked a few cigarettes and took another Seconal, wandered from her bedroom to the top of the dark staircase, pitched forward, and fell down the stairs to the landing, breaking her neck. Her head rested on a notebook with the draft of a poem in pencil. She had drawn a ring around the last three lines:

> I will control myself, or go inside.
> I will not flaw perfection with my grief.
> Handsome, this day: no matter who has died.

IT ALL MAKES one wonder what went so hideously wrong for the golden girl of the early 1920s. Milford and Epstein look to family dynamics, especially between Millay and her smothering mother and Millay and her competitive and resentful sisters. (An interesting aspect of Milford's book is the interpolated conversations between her and the "authorizer" of her official biography, Norma Millay.) Both biographers are kind to Boissevain, neither suspecting that he might have gotten some satisfaction from watching his brilliant and independent wife turn into the helpless prisoner of his care. Drug addiction, alcoholism, expensive tastes, expensive horses: these all took their toll. But what of the poetry that, after all, must be the reason why we take an interest in Edna Millay in the first place? The aristocracy of poets was, as she well knew, the true aristocracy—and where in its ranks does she stand?

For a start, it must be admitted that Millay's reputation as a writer of poems is not sufficiently inflated today to suffer puncture. Judgments from the past do not help much. In 1923, she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, but four years later the prize went to the utterly forgotten Leonora Speyer. Millay's books sold hundreds of thousands of copies, but so did James Whitcomb Riley's. Thomas Hardy said there were "two great things in the United States," the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay and skyscrapers: an arresting opinion, surely, but also a clever way for Hardy to register his disdain for the Modernists, placing Millay above Eliot and Pound, while seeming at the same time to embrace the modernity

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of the New York skyline. And besides, English readers liked the Englishness of Millay's poetry, which confirmed their prejudice—Frost and Eliot benefited from it as well—that British poetry and poetic diction constituted the mainstream of poetry in English.

No one doubts Millay's extraordinary skill as a poet, what Hart Crane called her "equipment," which, in his view, was "bound to succeed to the appreciative applause of a fairly large audience." But it was that applause, as essential to her dependent solace as alcohol or morphine, that closed off the full exploration of her poetic powers. Of the two biographers, Epstein makes the greater claims for her poetry, asserting again and again that she is the great love poet of the century, or "America's foremost love poet." But Millay's love poems are among her most meretricious. The sonnet from which he takes his title, "What lips my lips have kissed," includes such unbearable bits as this: "And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain / For unremembered lads that not again / Will turn to me at midnight with a cry."

Epstein claims, absurdly, that Eliot, Moore, Frost, and Stevens "together did not produce three love poems comparable to Millay's 'Pity me not because the light of day.'" Leaving aside Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which is surely some kind of love poem, Frost wrote incomparable love sonnets, including "Putting in the Seed," "The Silken Tent," and "Never Again Would Bird's Song Be the Same." It seems needlessly cruel to place these great sonnets, with their verbal panache and their delicate specificity, alongside Millay's verses. It is undeniable that, as Epstein claims, "Millay's lovers were flesh-and-blood men and women." But it is not true at all that "her sonnets preserve them in vivid detail." Those unremembered lads are right out of Housman, another English admirer of her poetry. Edmund Wilson was right that "when she came to write about her lovers, she gave them so little individuality that it was usually, in any given case, impossible to tell which man she was writing about."

Millay published hundreds of sonnets, and these, with rare exceptions, leave the impression of demands finely met—she wins the prize. There is a revealing passage in one of Millay's reports on a poet who had applied for a Guggenheim: "He writes nothing but sonnets. He has become so skilled in this form that he writes sonnets easily and naturally; his emotion is accustomed to being penned in this stall, and enters it willingly." The same, alas, could be said of Millay.

The exceptions are those poems in which she seems unruly in the stall. The early "Bluebeard" remains a wonderful poem, in which the secret of the pirate's castle is not his murdered wives, to whose number each disobediently curious wife is added, but a little room that he has reserved for himself:

> This door you might not open, and you did;
> So enter now, and see for what slight thing
> You are betrayed.... Here is no treasure hid,
> No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
> The sought-for Truth, no heads of women slain
> For greed like yours, no writhings of distress;
> But only what you see.... Look yet again:
> An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.
> Yet this alone out of my life I kept
> Unto myself, lest any know me quite;
> And you did so profane me when you crept
> Unto the threshold of this room tonight
> That I must never more behold your face.
> This now is yours. I seek another place.

The penultimate line too closely echoes Keats's "love and fame" sonnet, and I wish the last sentence was less grandiloquent, less like the closing of Tennyson's "Ulysses." (Frost would have found something closer to the speaking voice: "I'll find another place"?) Still, the poem is terrific in conception and execution, and it confirms Wilson's claim that Millay's great subject was not love but loneliness.

If we want to find a Millay for our times, it cannot be the Greenwich Village gamine who burned her candle at both ends. We need to find, instead, those poems that register what Wilson thought was deepest in her character, "something austere and even grim." Lyrics such as "Eel-Grass" and "Scrub" and "The Return" ("Earth does not understand her child, / Who from the loud gregarious town/Returns, depleted and defiled, / To the still woods, to fling him down....") express this austerity. So, in a different key, does her fine "Ballad of the Harp-Weaver," which I once heard Mabel Mercer recite at Carnegie Hall with unnerving effect.

One of her deepest soundings of this desolate region is the neglected sequence (unmentioned by Milford or Epstein) *Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree*, each sonnet of which has a fourteenth line extended to fourteen syllables. Here is the last part of the eleventh sonnet, when the speaker finds, after the snow has melted, an apron frozen on the ground:

> An apron long ago in such a night
> Blown down and buried in the deepening drift,
> To lie till April thawed it back to sight,
> Forgotten, quaint and novel as a gift—
> It struck her, as she pulled and pried and tore,
> That here was spring, and the whole year to be lived through once more.

That final line, in its heavy-hearted clarity and "realized" poverty, is worth any number of mock-Elizabethan sonnets strung together in *Fatal Interview*. ■

Afterlife After Death

By ISTVAN DEAK

Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001 by Harold Marcuse

(Cambridge University Press, 590 pp., $34.95)

FEW AREAS OF historical study are more popular today than the discussion of memory and commemoration. The historians who adopt this approach debate how people remember important events, what use consecutive generations make of the memory of these events, and why monuments tell us more about those who created them than about those whom the monument purports to commemorate. They are historians of subjectivity and culture. When their work concentrates on World War II and, more specifically, on concentration camps and the Holocaust, public interest in the subject must be taken for granted.

Legacies of Dachau falls squarely into

ISTVAN DEAK's new book, *Essays on Hitler's Europe*, has just been published by the University of Nebraska Press.

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this category, dealing as it does with the oldest Nazi camp, from which the chief ideas and practices of the Nazi system of *Konzentrazionslager* originated. Dachau was one of the few big camps to come under Western administration in 1945, which means that it has continued to have a complex history, being fought over publicly by survivors and outsiders, private groups and government authorities, left-wing politicians and right-wing politicians, business entrepreneurs, radical ideologists, and various religious denominations. The postwar history of the former Nazi camps in the eastern part of Germany, such as Buchenwald, is simpler: beginning as holding pens for POWs and Nazi war criminals, they rapidly transformed themselves into concentration camps for real or suspected enemies of the Communist state, and then into sites dedicated to the memory of the martyrs of the working class and to the struggle against American and West German imperialism.

Harold Marcuse, a historian who is the grandson of the philosopher Herbert Marcuse, has chosen an exciting subject, for Dachau after 1945 very much reflects the vagaries of Western democratic politics, and especially the politics of the cold war. Had Marcuse decided to use fewer of his accumulated notes, his book might also have been exciting to read. Unfortunately, he drowns the reader in too many details about too many things. In statistical tabulations that are much too precise, Marcuse presents the group characteristics of seven age cohorts and their relationship to Dachau and to the memory of Nazism in general. Individual historians, writers, and politicians are neatly fitted into specific age cohorts, their way of thinking apparently determined more by the year of their birth than by their personality and their experiences. There are one hundred fifty-six pages of endnotes. This is a very learned book, indeed, but a book likely to be appreciated primarily by the very informed and the very patient.

This is especially unfortunate because there are useful and even important ideas in Marcuse's book. He is a fair judge of personalities and historical dilemmas. He shows persuasively how German perceptions of the concentration camps changed over the last half-century. At first, most Germans tried to ignore Dachau and similar places of ignominy, developing a tripartite myth of self-exculpation, according to which (1) the Germans themselves were victimized, first by the Nazis and then by postwar occupation; and (2) ordinary Germans knew nothing of Nazi crimes; and (3) outraged by Nazi crimes, most Germans offered some form of passive resistance. Created in 1945, these myths have by now lost all significance, as Marcuse shows. Instead, millions of mostly younger Germans flock to Dachau—to date, twenty-one million people have visited the camp—to investigate and to learn. Marcuse is particularly convincing when he argues that sites of memory, like memory itself, are never static: as cultures change, so the caretakers of the rites of commemoration should also change their goals in order to better educate the public.

DACHAU WAS SOMETHING like the mother of all camps: the first place where suspected enemies of National Socialism were imprisoned for long periods without a trial; the first camp to come under the direct supervision of Heinrich Himmler; the model for all other concentration camps. It provided initial training to eighteen of the top camp commanders in the Nazi bureaucracy of oppression and murder. It was a place of horror, where prisoners were beaten or worked to death—and yet, as Marcuse explains, and as all visitors who spend a little time outside the camp site can testify, Dachau itself is a lovely old town, whose loveliness makes its horrifying role between 1933 and 1945 all the more jarring.

Visitors to the former concentration camp are offered a pleasing colored brochure, published in 1985 by Lorenz Reitmeier, then the mayor of Dachau, which outlines the past and the present of the town. Marcuse uses the brochure, along with many other things, to explain the varying images that the city fathers have tried to project over time. Rather than hiding the horrible episode in the city's past, Dachau's brochure mentions the camp at once, and only then turns to the history and the present-day glories of the place. It was settled by Celts in the fifth century B.C.E., and its first documented mention as "Dahaua" dates from 805 C.E. Although overshadowed by neighboring Munich, Dachau was always a popular place, enchanting the visitor with its ducal palace, its handsome churches, and its bucolic beauty.

From the mid-nineteenth century on, Dachau brought together some of Germany's greatest painters, among them Carl Spitzweg and Max Liebermann. In those years it also underwent an industrial transformation, and during World War I it housed a large ammunition factory whose products, ironically, may have killed more people than the camp later did. As both Marcuse and the municipal brochure explain, more than 200,000 prisoners passed through the camp between its creation on March 22, 1933 and its liberation on April 29, 1945. Between 32,000 and 35,000 died. This was a relatively low death rate, and it shows that Dachau was a concentration camp, not a death camp *(Vernichtungslager)*. It was not even a mixture of the two types as, for instance, Auschwitz was. The gas chamber at Dachau was used only experimentally. Prisoners died from torture, execution, hunger, or disease. Nor was Dachau a "Jewish camp"; the majority of its inmates were non-Jews, though Jews arrived in two great waves, about which more later.

As the municipal brochure explains, the end of World War I brought the closing of the munitions factory, and massive unemployment. All the greater, then, was the relief of the populace when the SS selected the factory's abandoned halls for its first prisoners: this brought increased tax revenues and employment to the depressed town. It is interesting to note, though, that fewer people in Catholic, working-class Dachau voted for the Nazis in the parliamentary elections of 1932 and 1933 than in most other places in Germany. Bavaria, in general, gave relatively little support to Hitler before he came to power.

The official brochure also assures its readers that, toward the end of the war, the citizens of the town tried to give food to starving prisoners in the camp. There is, indeed, no proof that the "Dachauer" behaved any worse toward the prisoners than other Germans—but Marcuse is rightly dissatisfied with Mayor Reitmeier's soothing and apologetic words. More introspection and more contrition are

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certainly warranted, even if it is not hard to understand the impulses of a mayor whose town must go on living even though its name will forever be associated with absolute evil. Dachau is one of the few German towns that has never succeeded in acquiring a "sister city" abroad. In truth, when one attends a concert in the magnificent Baroque ducal palace, or admires the undulating fairy-tale countryside from the terrace, it is agonizingly difficult to visualize the hordes of bedraggled and starving slaves who were often beaten in front of the locals. (I saw the camp in the early 1950s, when it did not yet contain an assemblage of modernistic chapels, and Christian as well as Jewish memorial buildings and monuments, all surrounded by carefully mowed grass. At that time it housed thousands of German expellees from Czechoslovakia in the same miserable barracks where the prisoners had once lived and died.)

Marcuse explains that in Dachau there were prisoners and there were prisoners, just as there were everywhere else in the concentration camp system, except that in Dachau the class differences were even more pronounced. The most privileged prisoners were those in the compound that was reserved for important personalities, such as the former French Prime Minister Léon Blum, the anti-Nazi Pastor Martin Niemöller, the former President of the Reichsbank Hjalmar Schacht (who was later tried and acquitted at Nuremberg), the former Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg, and many others. For these *Prominenten*, there was even a library. They received their food from the SS kitchen, their cells were not locked, and they had access to a canteen where they could buy supplies.

Dachau was also where Hitler's regime imprisoned most of its clerical opponents, two-thirds of whom were Poles. Altogether, 2,762 clergymen were held there, 93 percent of them Catholics. They lived separately from the other prisoners. They were allowed to celebrate Mass in a special room, and had a few other privileges. Still, as Marcuse shows, more than one-third of the clerics died, a much higher percentage than among the general prisoner population at Dachau.

The total number of inmates varied greatly over the years: 2,600 in December 1933, for example, but only 1,300 a year later. The *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938 brought in 18,000 new prisoners, many of whom stayed only temporarily, and in the wake of the violence of *Kristallnacht* in November of that year more than 10,000 wealthier Jews were dragged into the camp with the aim of terrorizing them into surrendering their property and emigrating. During the last years of the war, Dachau expanded to encompass numerous branches, and the number of prisoners skyrocketed. By early 1945, up to 4,000 people perished there every month, mostly Jews who had been brought in from the East. As Marcuse explains, of the 2,000 Jewish prisoners brought from Buchenwald in forty boxcars at the end of the war, only seventeen were alive after the liberation, and they would die soon.

Marcuse divides the postwar history of Dachau into five phases: from July 1945 to the summer of 1948, when the camp held 30,000 German Nazis and army officers, and when some of the major American postwar trials were held; from 1948 to the early 1960s, after the camp had been handed over to the Bavarian government, and when it held about 3,000 German refugees; from 1962 to 1965, when the historical buildings were torn down and the camp was turned into a memorial site; from 1965 to 1998, when there was stagnation in the camp's physical appearance but the number of young visitors increased annually; and the years since 1998, when the memorial site has become an integral element in the German educational curriculum. Not so long ago, the camp was difficult to find, buses from the railroad station were rare, and the camp's name was not marked on the bus leading to it or on city maps. Today buses regularly service a well-marked location. But this improvement has brought a new complication: this former hell, once run-down and hence still somewhat authentic in its bleak appearance, has become a great tourist attraction and a large source of commercial revenue.

Following the liberation of the camp in 1945, outraged American soldiers gunned down some of the SS guards and forced townspeople to parade past the mountain of corpses. Although shaken by the view, locals saw themselves, according to Marcuse, as victims of both the Nazis and the American soldiers. Terrified by what they perceived as criminals in the camp (true, common criminals had also been held at Dachau), townspeople insisted on their innocence and demanded protection. Marcuse quotes the photographer Margaret Bourke-White: "The Germans act as though the Nazis were a strange race of Eskimos who came down from the North Pole and somehow invaded Germany."

Worse, as the Americans hastened to repatriate the prisoners, some Eastern Europeans and many Eastern European Jews remained, who would not hear of returning to the "homeland." This disgruntled crowd reinforced the Germans' impression that the former prisoners were bad people. For a while Jews lived in close proximity to the interned German POWs and Nazis, who liked to equate their alleged mistreatment with that of the camp's wartime inmates. For many Germans, the mass murderers being tried at Dachau were victims of blatant injustice—especially after the churches began a campaign for their acquittal.

Guided by the Vatican of Pope Pius XII, German Catholic clergymen fought for the release of Nazi war criminals and often helped them to escape. Protestant churchmen behaved no better, and, amazingly, priests and ministers formerly imprisoned at Dachau were among the most militant opponents of the criminal proceedings. The former inmates Pastor Martin Niemöller and Catholic Bishop Johannes Neuhäusler tried their very best to save the lives of such SS arch-criminals as Oswald Pohl, former head of the SS administrative office for the concentration camps, and Paul Blobel, who had organized and executed the massacre of 35,000 Jews at Babi Yar near Kiev. Catholic bishops inundated American politicians with letters of protest emphasizing the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet credentials of the defendants; this, at a time when relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were going from bad to worse.

In the end, as Marcuse emphasizes, only two-thirds of the two hundred ninety-seven Germans sentenced to death by the courts of the Western allies were actually executed, and by 1955 only forty of those who had been given a life sentence were still in prison. Soon there would not be a single German war criminal in jail anywhere, except for the handful of major war criminals sentenced to imprisonment at the first great Nuremberg trial. It is worth mentioning in this context that tiny Hungary executed more war criminals than Germany, and that such countries as Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium imprisoned many more war criminals than were ever held in Germany or Austria.

Among the killers of Jews and other Europeans, then, the Germans got away with the least punishment. As Marcuse explains, the West German government, especially under Adenauer in the 1950s and 1960s, made certain that mass murderers returning from prisons abroad would receive restitution payments. All the released war criminals received their pensions or were allowed to make careers in state service, the professions, or the private sector. In 1966, to top it all off, Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, a "brown-collar

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criminal," as Marcuse calls the Nazi leaders, became chancellor of the West German republic.

Marcuse does not neglect to explain that amnesty for criminals is what Adenauer extorted from the Allies in exchange for West Germany's becoming a model democracy and a staunch ally. As for the brown-collar criminals, they too became perfect democrats, thus assuring continuity in the business and the administration of Germany and providing for the "economic miracle" and domestic peace. All in all, then, the Americans' denazification program was both a great failure and a great success. In his discussion of the brown-collar criminals, Marcuse expands his horizon, as he does almost everywhere in the book, to embrace all of West Germany. In fact, his book is both a history of Dachau and a history of the Federal Republic. It is hard to fault him for this: historically speaking, the two are indeed inseparable.

THE EARLY DECADES of the cold war were not favorable to former prisoners in Dachau. As Marcuse shows, eighty-four percent of the judges and the public prosecutors in democratic Bavaria had been members of the Nazi Party; and camp survivors were often excoriated in the press as the corrupters of German women and as black marketers (which undoubtedly some of them were). Even the freshly arrived American troops seemed to prefer the "neat, friendly German populace" to the unkempt, sullen Jews in the camps. Eventually the Jews emigrated, and eventually the black market disappeared.

Meanwhile the survivors of Dachau were mostly unable to come to an agreement on how the camp should best be remembered. Even the Jews among them were profoundly divided, in Marcuse's account, between the German Jews and those from Eastern Europe. The former generally spent only a few weeks in Dachau following *Kristallnacht* and before emigrating; for most of them, Nazism was only an aberration in the long history of Germans. For the Eastern European Jews, by contrast, Dachau was one more hellhole among the many hellholes through which the Germans had driven them.

There were too many different kinds of people in the Dachau camp for them to arrive at a consensus about commemoration: Jews, "asocials" (tramps, beggars, and other Germans deemed unworthy of living among their compatriots), prostitutes, priests, politicians, aristocrats, homosexuals, sectarians, Social Democratic functionaries, criminals, Communists, Red Army soldiers, French and other wartime resistance fighters. Not even the memory of common suffering united them, because their sufferings had varied so enormously.

But eventually the first monuments were erected, and the interest in the camp on the part of young Germans increased. Marcuse explains the crucial influence exercised on the German public by the publication of Anne Frank's diary in the 1950s, the Eichmann trial in 1961, the first production of Rolf Hochuth's anti-papal play *The Deputy* in 1963, and the broadcast of the American television miniseries *Holocaust* in 1979.

MEANWHILE, FASCINATING figures appeared on the postwar Dachau scene, such as the Dominican Father Leonhard Roth, who as a prisoner had heroically cared for his fellow inmates, and after the war first served as the spiritual adviser of the SS prisoners, then worked as curate in the refugee settlement, and later became pastor of the newly created Dachau camp parish. While doing all these things, he alternately voiced pro–National Socialist, anti-Communist, and pro-Soviet sentiments. A reputed homosexual who had worn the black triangle of the asocials in the camp (many priests imprisoned by the Germans had been charged with homosexuality and/or currency manipulation), Father Roth committed suicide in 1960. It is a pity that Marcuse tells the remarkable story of Father Roth only in snatches.

Most interesting is the problem presented by the generation of 1968, whose members went furthest, according to Marcuse, in questioning their fathers about their activities during the Nazi era. Many in the younger generation completely rejected West German society for its corruption, its political and moral impenitence, its self-satisfaction, and its tolerance of ex-Nazis in high positions. Still, as Marcuse shows, militant members of this generation went too far, eventually becoming not very different from their Nazified ancestors: self-satisfied, dogmatic, impatient, and wildly intolerant. Radical young Germans called the Israeli athletes murdered at Munich "Zionist soldiers masquerading as athletes"; and at Entebbe, in 1976, during the "Red Army's" hijacking of an Air France airbus, the German commander of that terrorist group "selected" the Jewish passengers for execution following the expiration of the forty-eight-hour deadline.

I remember how outraged I was, at Heidelberg University in the late 1960s, at the sight of radical German students cruelly harassing the most liberal professors, while the university administration and the state looked the other way. The whole affair made me think grimly of the Weimar Republic. Only recently did I learn that the liberal professor I most admired had once been a dedicated Nazi—a fact of which the student radicals were equally ignorant. They hated the professor for being a part of the "fascist," "imperialist," and "pro-American" West German establishment. In September 1968, when former anti-Nazi resistance fighters from abroad held a memorial meeting at Dachau, accompanied by detachments of soldiers from their own countries, German left-wing radicals mounted a demonstration against the "NATO imperialists" at the site of the concentration camp. Outraged, the former French inmates, many of them Communists, stormed the young German radicals with the cry, *"C'est les fascistes!"*

Once the "successor generation" had challenged the myths that were created in self-defense by the generations tainted by the war, more and more Germans, Marcuse writes, are relinquishing the legend of their own victimization, and are beginning to discover the many forgotten victims of the Holocaust, such as homosexuals and Gypsies. True, there have been some setbacks to historical understanding, as in 1985, when President Reagan visited the military cemetery in Bitburg, with its graves of Waffen SS soldiers. The presidential visit temporarily strengthened the argument of those who wished to make an exonerating equation between fallen German soldiers and victims of Nazism. Yet the tone of the new Germany was set by West German President Richard von Weizsäcker, who, three days after the symbolic handclasp at Bitburg, unequivocally repudiated the myth of ignorance and branded the Germans as perpetrators in an extraordinary speech delivered in the Bundestag.

Toward the end of his book, Marcuse discusses the impact of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* on the German public, and, even more, the success of a recent traveling exhibition about crimes committed by the Wehrmacht in the East. It is indeed hard to exaggerate the importance of that exhibition, created by a private group in Hamburg, in unmasking the reputed innocence of ordinary German officers and soldiers. Today Dachau—and, one might say, united Germany as a whole—is a place of learning where, in the view of Marcuse, reflection has replaced reflexes. He concludes his important book on an optimistic note, calling for a happy balance between antiquarian preservation and the critical deconstruction of mythical histories, whether at Dachau or at other sites of commemoration. There is no reason to disagree with such a conclusion, even if it is easier said than done. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Protocols

ONE OF THE MOST VIVID experiences of my time as a graduate student at Harvard was a seminar I took with the preeminent liberal political theorist John Rawls. The discussion centered on Rawls's later work, in which he divorced his liberalism from the claim of absolute truth. His argument was only cogent, he averred, if read and understood by people who already shared some basic premises—the need for consent, the reliance on reason, a tone of civility, a relatively open mind. With characteristic tactlessness, I asked him what his response would be if Hitler joined the debate and disagreed with him. Rawls answered that there could be no discourse with Hitler. We would have to agree that he was simply crazy, a madman at a Cambridge dinner party, a figure outside the conversation. To Hitler, Rawls had nothing to say, except *please go away*.

BUT WHAT IF HITLER REFUSES TO GO away? My mind has drifted back to that conversation recently, as we try to grapple with the reality staring us in the face: Something like Hitler is back, and it is waging war on the United States. Part of the current crisis is that many of us simply do not have a philosophy capable of countering him.

IS THIS A GROTESQUE EXAGGERATION? The argument *ad Hitlerum* is, after all, such a high-school debating tactic that it should be employed only with extreme caution. The reason I invoke it is not simply because we have an irrational, lethal movement stirring many people across the globe in a call to mass murder. But because one central element of that movement, which we are doing our best to ignore, but which is increasingly unignorable, is pathological anti-Semitism.

YES, OF COURSE, THE GEOPOLITICAL differences between anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and anti-Semitism in the Arab world are vast. Germany was the preeminent military power of its time; the Arab nations are decidedly not. Germany had a large, and largely defenseless, Jewish population within its borders and millions more on its doorstep; the Arab states have only Israel, which despite its tiny size is hardly defenseless. But ignoring a virulent ideology because we believe those who hold it to be weak is the kind of thinking that recently enabled the murder of 5,000 people in New York. So consider the following: According to a recent *Newsweek* poll, 48 percent of Pakistanis believe Jews were responsible for the World Trade Center bombing. A plurality of Egyptians agree.

THIS SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE. Vicious anti-Semitism is now the official doctrine of most Arab governments and their organs of propaganda. The official Palestinian Authority newspaper, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, for example, regularly contains references to the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," the loopy nineteenth-century hoax that suggests Jews run the world. As one article put it (at the height of the Oslo peace process, no less): "It is important to conduct the conflict according to the foundations which both are leaning on... particularly the Jews... such as the Torah, the Talmud and the Protocols [of the Elders of Zion].... All signs unequivocally prove that the conflict between the Jews and the Muslims is an eternal on-going conflict, even if it stops for short intervals.... This conflict resembles the conflict between man and Satan.... This is the fate of the Muslim nation, and beyond that the fate of all the nations of the world, to be tormented by this nation [the Jews]. The fate of the Palestinian people is to struggle against the Jews on behalf of the Arab peoples, the Islamic peoples and the peoples of the entire world."

HERE'S A SUMMARY OF A GEM THAT appeared in Egypt's *Al Ahram*, the largest newspaper in that country: "A compilation of the 'investigative' work of four reporters on Jewish control of the world states that Jews have become the political decision-makers and control the media in most capitals of the world (Washington, Paris, London, Berlin, Athens, Ankara) and says that the main apparatus for the Jews to control the world is the international Jewish lobby which works for Israel." It is worth noting here that every word *Al Ahram* prints is vetted and approved by the Egyptian government, a regime to which the United States—i.e., you and I—contributes $2 billion a year.

OR TAKE SYRIA, A THUGOCRACY whose leader indulged in an anti-Semitic outburst in front of the pope, but a state that Colin Powell nonetheless wishes to bring into his grand coalition. In 1983 Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass wrote a book entitled *The Matzah of Zion*, claiming that Jews murder Arab children to knead their blood into matzahs for Passover. An article about the book that appeared in *Al Ahram* one year ago (and was noted by the invaluable Middle East Media Research Institute) concluded with the following sentences: "The bestial drive to knead Passover matzahs with the blood of non-Jews is [confirmed] in the records of the Palestinian police where there are many recorded cases of the bodies of Arab children who had disappeared being found, torn to pieces without a single drop of blood. The most reasonable explanation is that the blood was taken to be kneaded into the dough of extremist Jews to be used in matzahs to be devoured during Passover." If this is the "most reasonable explanation," can you imagine an unreasonable one? But it gets worse. *The Matzah of Zion* will soon be turned into a movie. According to MEMRI, "the producer stated that the primary goal of the film is 'to respond to all of the Zionist films distributed by the American film industry, which is backed by the Zionist propaganda apparatus. Among these films is *Schindler's List*, which supports the idea of the Jews' right to the land of Palestine.'" *Schindler's List* versus *The Matzah of Zion*: just a battle of ideas.

THE SOBERING TRUTH IS THAT SOMEwhere in my head, I knew all this already. It is not a revelation that large segments of the Arab world—at all levels of society—are not just anti-Israel, but fanatically anti-Semitic. Bernard Lewis wrote in 1986: "The demonization of Jews goes further than it had ever done in Western literature, with the exception of Germany during the period of Nazi rule. In most Western countries, anti-Semitic divagations on Jewish history, religion, and literature are more than offset by a great body of genuine scholarship... In modern Arabic writing there are few such countervailing elements." So why did I look the other way? Why did I discount this anti-Semitism on the grounds that these are alien cultures and we cannot fully understand them, or because these pathologies are allied with more legitimate (if to my mind unpersuasive) critiques of Israeli policy? I guess I was thinking like John Rawls. We in the West simply do not want to believe that this kind of hatred still exists; and when it emerges, we feel uncomfortable. We do everything we can to change the subject. Why the denial, I ask myself? What is it about this sickness that we do not understand by now? And what possible excuse do we have not to expose and confront it with all the might we have?

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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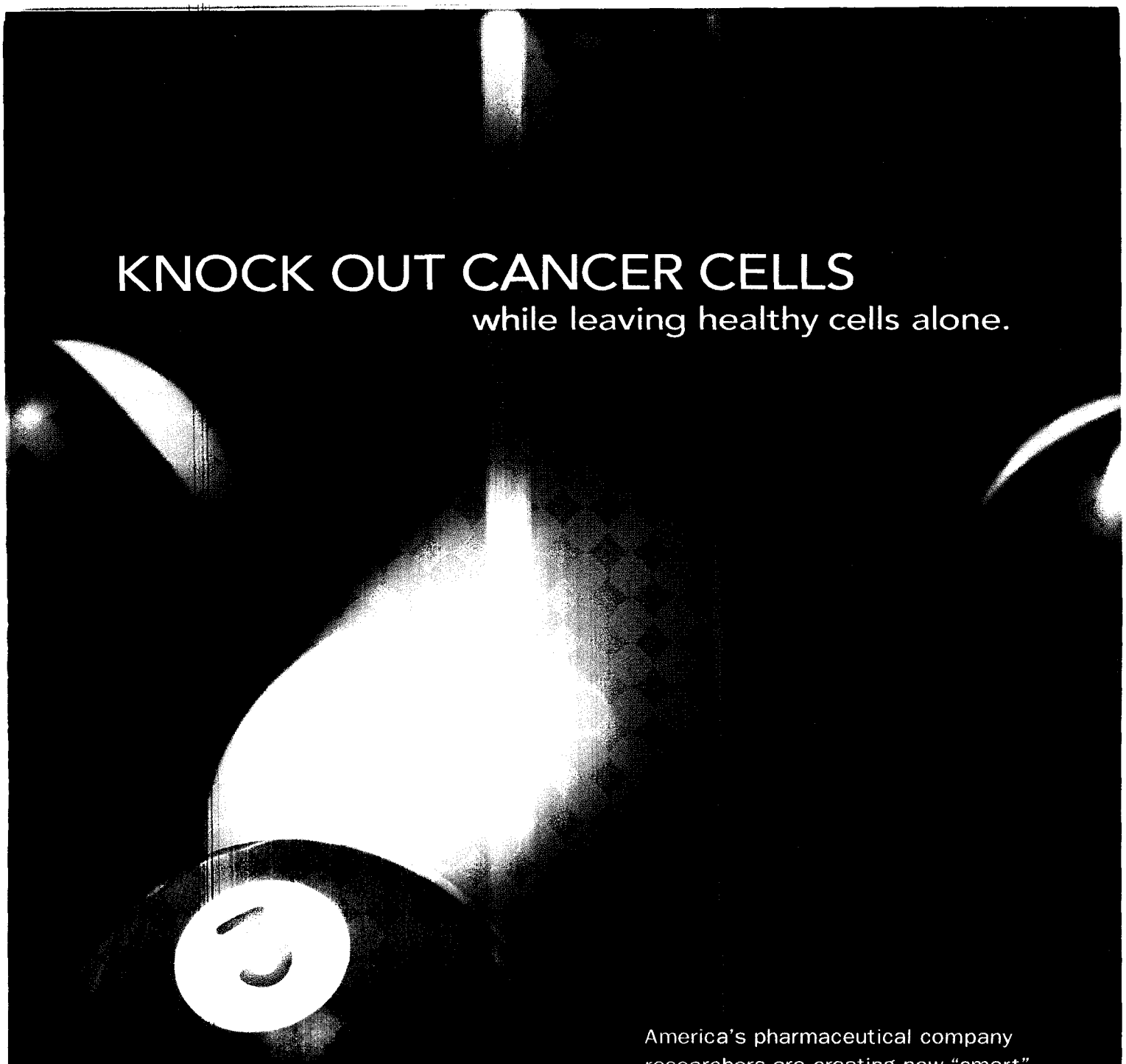

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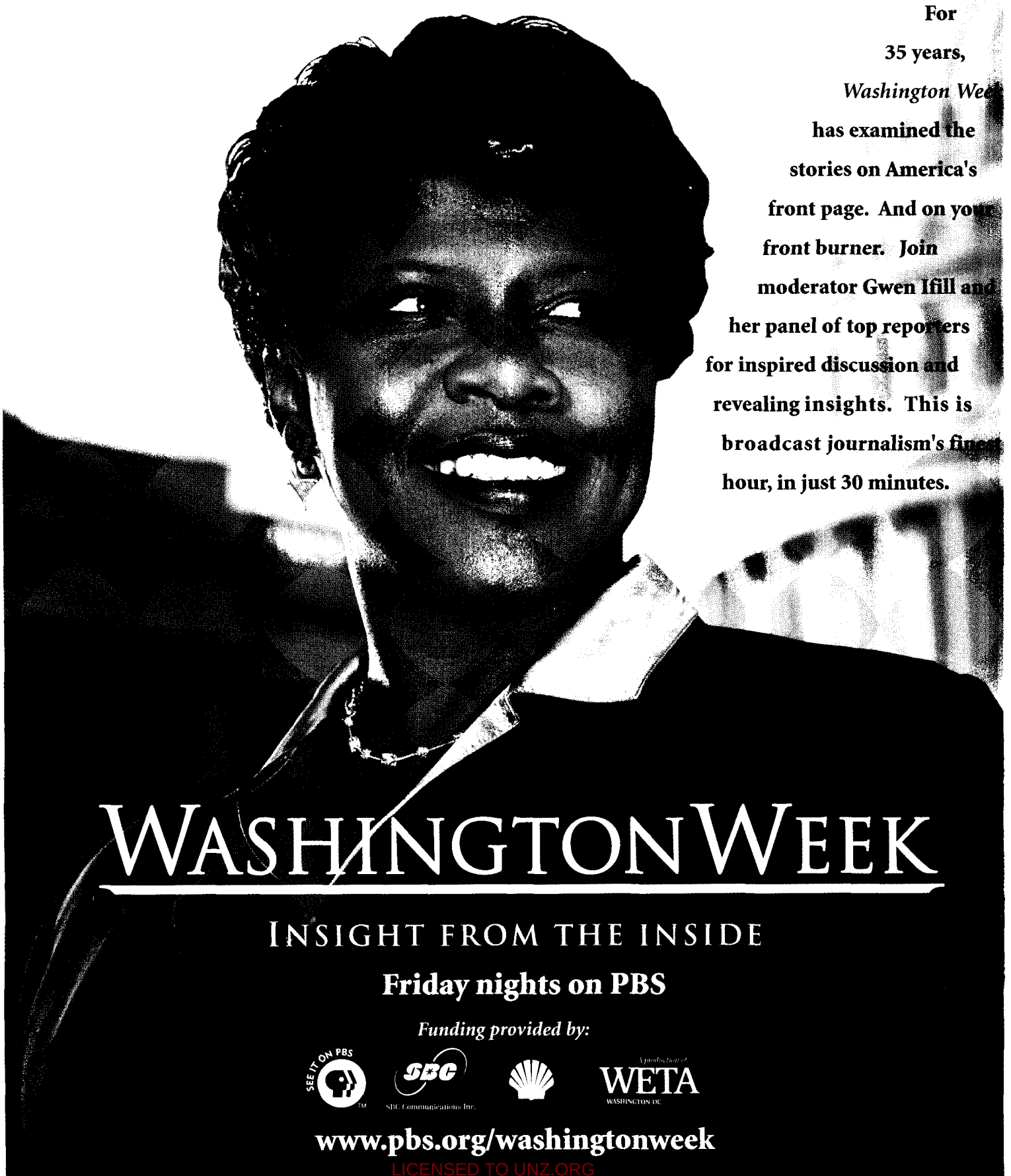

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